

Dr Hanes's new work in the field of Old Testament theology is a remarkably useful tool for students of biblical studies and theology. It provides a helpful and thorough survey of the main currents in the field helping non-specialists and specialists alike to understand the context and contributions of Old Testament theologians and scholars to understanding the pivot points in the development of Old Testament studies. His work will prove useful to a generation of those serious about the use of Scripture in their academic work.

Trey Dimsdale, J.D., MDiv
Director of Program Outreach,
The Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty, USA

I strongly recommend Professor Hanes's book *An Introduction to the Theology of the Hebrew Bible* to theological professionals to improve their reading and understanding of Hebrew biblical text as well as to theological students to learn both to work critically with the biblical text and to approach available biblical interpretative literature with overview and criticism. I am convinced that this publication will increase their interest in the Old Testament because, as the author himself points out, the lack of exegetical processing may be due to the lack of interest in the Old Testament as observed these days.

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I commend the book *An Introduction to the Theology of the Hebrew Bible* with hope that it will fulfill the author's intended function and help readers to see God's salvation through the Bible in a new context of Revelation 11:15. I firmly believe that the book will also serve as a useful working tool for interpreting biblical texts to all preachers, evangelists, catechists, chaplains and social workers in Christian institutions.

ThDr Ján Liguš, PhD
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In a context where not every student of theology is fluent in English, and all there is to read on any given topic is what the instructor provides, Hanes's book serves the clear purpose of providing a very short introduction, demonstrating that biblical theology has often been the slave of its proponents'

philosophical convictions. The English version fills a lacuna for pastors and young theologians, exposing the invisible philosophical underpinnings of modern schools of biblical theology. One could complain about what is not included, or the author's own biases, but Hanes makes up for those potential shortcomings with a text that is surprisingly concise and clearly written while maintaining an admirable balance between breadth, depth and nuance.

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Although some might think that accounts of Old Testament theology just give a neutral description of the content of the Old Testament, we must always take into account the worldviews of their authors. With this basic idea in mind, *An Introduction to the Theology of the Hebrew Bible* gives a short overview of studies in this discipline, from the Early Church (yes even from the New Testament) to the first decade in the twenty-first century, relating it – from an evangelical background – to the philosophical and theological backgrounds of their authors. The fact that this work is short has the advantage of keeping the lines clear without losing itself in details.

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An Introduction to the Theology of the Hebrew Bible



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An Introduction to the Theology of the Hebrew Bible

Pavel Hanes



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Published 2019 by Langham Global Library
An imprint of Langham Publishing
www.langhampublishing.org

Langham Publishing and its imprints are a ministry of Langham Partnership

Langham Partnership
PO Box 296, Carlisle, Cumbria, CA3 9WZ, UK
www.langham.org

ISBNs:

978-1-78368-730-5 Print

978-1-78368-731-2 ePub

978-1-78368-732-9 Mobi

978-1-78368-733-6 PDF

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The book was published with the support of the project “The Evangelical Theology of the Old Testament” no. 06/2017/OPS-15.

Translator: Peter Málík, MPhil, PhD.

All quotations not originally in English or published in translation were translated by Peter Málík.

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-78368-730-5

Cover & Book Design: projectluz.com

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Preface

In his *Systematic Theology*, Paul Tillich states that “methodological imperialism is as dangerous as political imperialism.”¹ The theological method that he follows is, in his view, implied in the very human existence concerning which God provides answers. Systematic theology, therefore, utilizes the method of correlation, such that “it makes an analysis of the human situation out of which the existential questions arise, and it demonstrates that the symbols used in the Christian message are the answers to these questions.”² Theology is thus limited to questions posed by every human being.

In contrast to this is the view that, without the revelation of God, no human being is able to recognize their real existential problem and hence ask the right question. Evangelical author Oswald Chambers, for instance, asserts that the gospel of Christ creates needs within people of which they are unaware without the gospel itself and which come about only under the influence of the proclaimed word of God.³

This conflict may be one of the main differences between critical philosophical theology on the one hand and evangelical theology on the other. For our purposes, however, it is important to note Tillich’s methodological link between theological thought and philosophical analysis of human existence. This correlation, which Tillich worked out methodologically and applied to systematic theology, is to some extent present in every theological work – whether one likes it or not. Karl Barth goes as far as to argue that not to mix the gospel with philosophy is akin to being free from the bondage of sin.⁴ The presence of thus “correlated” philosophy in theology is a very interesting and important determining factor of theological thought.

One should note, however, that, in biblical theology, this (greater or lesser) dependence on philosophy is mostly present only by implication. In other words, it is not to be expected that authors would depict their worldview in the opening pages of their works, let alone list the philosophers or thinkers who inspired them. Most likely, it is expected that the student/reader knows, or in the course of study will come to recognize (or “conjecture”), the author’s

1. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 1:60.

2. Tillich, 1:62.

3. Chambers, *Complete Works*, 856.

4. Barth, *Church Dogmatics I/2*, 728–729.

philosophical and methodological presuppositions. However, experience tells that students of theology are not sufficiently philosophically apt to meet this expectation. This is one of the reasons for undertaking the present work. Although it is true that every theological work “carries with it some of the personal idiosyncrasies or peculiarities of the author;”⁵ the overall philosophical outlook is always present in the background. One often learns about it from biographical information about the author.⁶

Another related problem pertains to the nature of biblical, particularly Old Testament, theology. Whereas systematic theology takes over worldview questions which as such often clearly correlate with contemporary philosophical problems, biblical theology, which is at its core a *historical* theological discipline, deals with topics where such a correlation is far more problematic and easily disappears from view. And yet, the question of correlation with the authors’ worldview and ontological commitment, as well as their epistemological theory, is decisive for one’s understanding of the overall construction of any system of biblical theology – as is the case with systematic theology.

In *An Introduction to the Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, I endeavour to characterize the influence of numerous authors’ philosophical presuppositions on their method of analyzing the biblical text, as well as the limits and goals determined by their philosophical outlook. I also take into account my own experience, in which the correlation of theological system with philosophical position led to the well-known feeling expressed by the interjection “aha!”

An important factor behind this book’s origin was a research grant entitled “Evangelical Theology of the Old Testament,” which provided funds for my research leave to the United Kingdom and thus enabled access to the extensive collection of biblical studies literature in the Tyndale House library, Cambridge. I would wish that this uncovering of the lines of hidden ideological fields might lead to further research, which would necessitate the study of the biographies, personal interests, and psychology of individual authors. That line of inquiry, however, is beyond the scope of the present work.

5. Preuss, *Old Testament Theology I*, 1.

6. For instance, Søren Kierkegaard’s influence on the thought of Karol Nadránsky (1927–2016), a Slovak Old Testament scholar, may be inferred from Nadránsky’s essay “O dojmoch z Dánska vo forme listu S. Kierkegaardovi” (Concerning the impressions of Denmark in the form of a letter to S. Kierkegaard). Králik, “Søren Kierkegaard’s Influence on the Thinking of Karol Nadránsky,” 25–34.

An Introduction to the Subject

Biblical theology of the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible) has had a very complicated and interesting history. As with philosophy, the study of its history provides a good introduction to the subject area, as it presents alternative approaches to, and constructions of, the discipline – their advantages as well as their limits. The humanities, which are liable to the influence of what Germans call *Zeitgeist* (“spirit of the times”), require the critical comparison of contemporary thought with history, lest we fall prey to what C. S. Lewis referred to as “chronological snobbery.”¹

In order to understand the presuppositions and conclusions of various subject areas and theologians, we need to reflect on the philosophical and religious premises – or worldviews – with which they operate. Because these methodological motives are often hidden “behind the text,” in this work I shall attempt to point out the “field lines”² of Old Testament theological thought – that is, the presuppositions which bespeak the limits, direction and sources of respective theological systems.

Addressing such challenges is by no means easy. Study of the Old Testament from both a scientific and Christian perspective at the same time is one of the most difficult theological problems.³ A panoramic overview of various, often conflicting, approaches to the subject matter will thus serve as a point of departure for further study of this, still very lively, field of contemporary

1. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, 206.

2. In electromagnetics, a “field line” is defined as “an imaginary line or curve drawn through a region of space so that its tangent at any point is in the direction of the electric-field vector at that point.” Young and Roger Freedman, *University Physics*, 733.

3. For instance, Pannenberg points out that the Enlightenment theologians, as well as Schleiermacher, tried to push the Old Testament out of Christian theology and to label it as a source of a different (Jewish) religion. See Pannenberg, *Wissenschaftstheorie und Theologie*, 262.

theology. At the same time, a personal witness of faith shall be added to the arguments themselves.⁴

The Term “Theology of the Old Testament”

The traditional term for the theological discipline which systematizes theological contents of the Old Testament is called “Old Testament theology.” This designation, however, is problematic for several reasons.⁵ For one thing, the label “Old Testament” comes from the New Testament (“Old Covenant”), hence implying Christian theology and its *evaluating* view concerning the Hebrew part of the Bible. Here we must note that the New Testament thus labels only the Mosaic (Sinaitic) law, rather than all thirty-nine (twenty-two in the Hebrew canon) books of the Tanakh. As such, the Tanakh (Hebrew Bible) also includes texts which not only do not contain the Mosaic law but which do not even presuppose its existence (e.g. the Book of Job). We should also consider that, in the New Testament, the adjective “old” is used to designate an *obsolete* (and hence no longer valid) covenant rather than stating anything about its age. Moreover, theology of the Hebrew Bible as a *historical* discipline must not forget that, at the time when the Mosaic law (i.e. the old covenant) originated, the New Testament (i.e. the Greek part of the Christian Bible) was still a future development; hence, referring to the Old Testament when studying the Hebrew Bible is an anachronistic construct based on later developments.

It would seem, then, that the “Old Testament” is not a suitable designation for the collection of all books of the Hebrew Bible – not only from a historical standpoint but also from the standpoint of the Christian faith and biblical theology. Instead of the term “Old Testament,” therefore, I shall refer to the collection of thirty-nine books written in Hebrew (and Aramaic) as the “Hebrew Bible” or using the Hebrew abbreviation “Tanakh.”⁶ The label “Old Testament” will be used to designate the Hebrew Bible only when such usage is appropriate to the context.

4. Petr Macek writes, “A Christian witness may also exist without an argument, but an argument stemming out of the gospel cannot hold up without a witness.” Gallus and Macek, *Teologie jako věda*, 212.

5. When it comes to *demarcation of the text* alone, we may agree with the following remark: “The question does not arise because the traditional term is in any way ambiguous.” Barton, *Old Testament*, 83.

6. “T” for Torah, “N” for Nevi'im, and “Kh” or “K” for Ketuvim.

Theology of the Tanakh and the Old Testament

From the history of the discipline of Old Testament theology, it is possible to observe that interpretations of the Hebrew Bible, both in general and within the context of Christian theology in particular, exhibit considerably greater divergence than interpretations of the New Testament within the sister discipline of New Testament theology. The problem of understanding the Hebrew Bible already begins with the very term “Old Testament,” which stands in tension with the discipline’s basic method. Biblical theology of the Tanakh investigates a theology that is fixed to *the time period in which it had its origin*. Not only does the Old Testament label inadvertently bring an element of *evaluation* to the historical method but also a chronological aspect which privileges one covenant within the Hebrew Bible above others which are mentioned therein. Westermann puts it cogently:

A theology of the Old Testament has the task of summarizing and viewing together what the Old Testament as a whole, in all its sections, says about God. This task is not correctly understood if one declares one part of the Old Testament to be the most important and gives it prominence over the others; or if one regards the whole as determined by one concept such as covenant, election, or salvation; or if one asks beforehand what the center of the Old Testament is. The New Testament clearly has its center in the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ, to which the Gospels are directed and which the Epistles take as their starting point. The Old Testament, however, bears no similarity at all to this structure, and it is thus not possible to transfer the question of a theological center from the New to the Old Testament.⁷

One possibility of a “clean” methodological solution for the historical biblical theology would be to “forget” the fact that there is the New Testament at all, and so read the Tanakh without reflecting the New Testament interpretations of the Old Testament texts. A major problem with such an approach, however, is that it implicitly works with a hypothesis that one may understand the Tanakh with some sort of “neutral” attitude to the New Testament and hence without reflecting on Christ’s and the apostles’ statements concerning the Old

7. Westermann, *Elements of Old Testament Theology*, 9.

Testament.⁸ If the Tanakh is not a divinely inspired, authoritative text, then we can do with it whatever we like – with or without a faith in Christ. But if the New Testament is a divinely revealed and inspired interpretation of the Old Testament, then the study of the Hebrew Bible – if it is to have any hope for the correct understanding at all – must proceed from the christological interpretations presented in the New Testament. Does this mean a wholesale rejection of the basic methods of the discipline? No, but we must make a distinction between, firstly, an applied interpretation of the Tanakh for the *present*, where the evangelical, New Testament-based interpretation is predicated on a belief in the divine inspiration of the text as binding for one's life and, second, a *historical exegesis* for which the New Testament interpretation is still but a future matter. The New Testament's answer to the question of the Old Testament is Jesus himself (John 5:39),⁹ though understanding just what this means is by no means simple. Yet without this answer we can hardly harmonize such expressions of faith as offered by Ecclesiastes and, say, the Book of Ruth.¹⁰ Though the New Testament perspective does not automatically ensure a correct understanding and interpretation of so wide-ranging a literary collection as the Hebrew Bible, it does provide the framework by which biblical theology endeavours to put all the texts of the Tanakh into a proper context.

If we follow Brueggeman's classification according to which the Tanakh is of concern to three interpretive communities – orthodox, liberal, and pietist – then, in this history of the theology of the Hebrew Bible, I come from the pietistic (evangelical¹¹) perspective, attempting to inform the reader accurately concerning the issues raised by orthodox and liberal theologians as well. From this follows that I do not regard the Hebrew Bible (Tanakh) as a well-meaning yet naïve, primitive or problematic “witness of Israel about God,” but as an *authoritative* word and an ontologically objective message of the living God that is valid for Israel and all humanity alike. The crucial difference lies in the fact that, while the *witness* of Israel concerning God is understood as one of many *human attempts* to understand God, the inspired word of the Bible is

8. “It may be laid down as axiomatic that, whatever they may be for others, these ancient Scriptures can never have less value for the Christian Church than they had for the Church's Master – Christ Himself.” Orr, *Problem of the Old Testament*, 3.

9. “You study [ἐπιμαρτυρεῖτε] the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me.”

10. Naturally, the New Testament approach is not some sort of “magic wand” by which to resolve every difficulty. Rather, the christological approach of the New Testament provides direction for theological interpretation.

11. For the purposes of the present book, the term *pietistic* may be considered synonymous with the word *evangelical*.

the authoritative word of God, which is *God's evaluation* (or judgement) of Israel as well as all other human beings in this world. Such an approach is in keeping with the traditional, conservative and, most importantly, Reformed understanding of the Bible as the source of faith and the hope of salvation for an individual as well as for the entire society.

Even so, the fact that conservative evangelicals and fundamentalists regard the Bible (“the Word of God”) as *infallible* (sometimes they use the term *inerrant*) does not mean that their understanding thereof, too, is *inerrant*; they also do not claim that the Hebrew words of the Tanakh are to be identified with the eternal and perfect mind of God, which cannot be captured by the human language. It does mean, though, that they approach the text of the Tanakh as an inspired record of God’s word through which the Spirit of God also speaks to us who live in the present.¹²

Tanakh and the History of Israel

One of the problems with which biblical theology of the Tanakh must deal is the historical reliability of the Old Testament’s historical records and narratives. In the history of the discipline, one may roughly classify authors as conservative or critical based on the degree of reliability which they ascribe to the historical claims of the Bible. Ever since the time of philosophical rationalism (and especially since the rise of the historical-critical method), conservative approaches to the Bible have often been regarded as unscientific. Just what constitutes “science” and “scientific,” however, would require a far too extensive and complicated discussion to develop here. Yet it is not completely possible to avoid it either, considering that the “scientific” requirement is the distinguishing feature of all university disciplines. In current biblical theology, the historical-critical method enjoys majority representation, compelling the conservative approach to be in a defence mode if it wants to remain in the university setting at all. In this study, I endeavour to set up a dialogue between the conservative approaches of current evangelicalism on the one hand and critical authors on the other. In doing so, I shall strive to avoid unhelpful labelling and classifications, while at the same time leaning openly towards a conservative belief in the authority of the Bible, particularly as presented by the Reformers.

12. “[A] genuine Old Testament theology can only be possible when the ancient Hebrew Scriptures are recognized as constituting nothing less than the oracles of God.” Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 437.

The offence which the conservative Christian attitude to the Bible (especially the Tanakh) typically causes in the scientific community is well captured by the following statement:

We are asked to believe that an assortment of writers, all of them (with the exception of Luke) Jews, none of them (not even Luke; see Luke 1:1–4) a scientific historian, on the basis of a series of happenings of minor political importance that took place almost before history, as we understand it, had got well under way, had already discerned the meaning and purpose of history.¹³

If we consider this “assortment of writers” of the Bible to be people who present the results of their *unscientific* research, then we must agree that we currently know more about history – simply because we live later and many events, which would still be the unknown future for biblical authors, may now be evaluated as the past – owing to the well-known trivial advantage of looking backwards. The claim which these unscientific authors assert on the reader is characterized by the assertion that their records and interpretations of events are communicated to us with divine authority, often accompanied by the statement “Thus says the Lord (YHWH).” The inspired authority of the text is the initial presupposition as well as the guideline of conservative research into, and interpretation of, the Bible. It is a conviction that, behind all the authors, genres and diverse texts, there is one God, whose word is being presented here – in the biblical text – in such a way that people may believe in it, obey it, and expect their thoughts and lives to be judged by it.

A foundational example (we could also call it “a stone of stumbling”) is the Jonah narrative. Is it a historical record, a legend or even a fairy tale? Modern interpreters usually try to avoid the critical mockery that accompanies the improbability of this particular story. Instead, they propound an understanding of the narrative based on literary genre:

A careful reading of the book of Jonah suggests that the misunderstanding arises from attempts to make it something that it is not. The story is full of humor, exaggeration, irony, and ridicule. These features indicate that the book was never intended to be read as history but was written as a kind of satire. No wonder it has been misunderstood! Trying to read the story as history

13. North, “History,” 2:611.

can only lead to a failure to appreciate its true nature and to misconstrue its primary message.¹⁴

This kind of interpretation offers an exegetical approach to the text which had long been ignored; hence, its exegetical potential ought to be handled responsibly. However, the problem arises where a genre-based interpretation denies the historical reality and also contradicts the New Testament interpretation, which is decisive for the Christian faith. The author of the aforementioned appraisal of the Book of Jonah comments on Jesus's use of the Jonah story (Matt 12:38–40) thus: "Jesus's reference to the story of Jonah does not necessarily mean that the story actually happened any more than his telling of parables requires them to be actual occurrences."¹⁵ The author never mentions, however, that Jesus's reference to the Jonah narrative is a *sign* (σημείον) concerning the work of God, aimed at the doubting Jews, and hence *evidence* of his messianic commission for the unbelievers. If the Jonah story is not a record of a *genuine* historical reality (in the sense of the so-called *naïve realism*), but only a literary expression of the author's hidden intentions, then Jesus's likening of his death and resurrection to Jonah's stay in the belly of a fish is not supported by a real historical event; if this is so, it casts doubt upon – rather than supports – the central event of the entire Christian faith. Parables are not meant to present *evidence* concerning tangible reality; instead, they are a dialectical literary device whose grounding in a genuine historical event (or lack thereof) is insignificant.

Needless to say, this conflict cannot be resolved ultimately in a "scientific" manner. In the realm of history and religion, any endeavour to have the last word must be ruled out – unlike in the natural sciences where such may be possible by means of experiment or mathematical calculation. On the positive side, faith is a matter of an individual decision, which cannot be handed down mechanically as a set of scientifically proven facts. Indeed, the room for a personal witness and free choice always remains open.

14. McKenzie, *How to Read the Bible*, 2.

15. McKenzie, 186.

2

From the Beginnings of the Church until the Early Modern Period

Old Testament theology as a self-standing theological discipline is a result of application of the norms of rationalist thought to theology. Rationalism regarded reason as a crucial – if not *the* crucial – means for knowing the truth. It was marked by a denial of the possibility of miracles and a disbelief in God’s revelation and the inspiration of Scripture. What proved to be decisive was the question of authority – what ought to have higher value and validity, the text of Scripture or the plausibility of reason informed by “normal” human experience? The origins of such rationalist theology may be traced to eighteenth-century Germany, where it began to take shape under the influence of Christian Wolff’s (1679–1754) philosophical system, which was reworked for the purposes of religious education.¹ The popularity of rationalist arguments for Christianity led to the use of its philosophical methods in theology.² When Johann Salomo Semler (1725–1791) brought these methods to biblical theology, Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1752–1827), the “father of Old Testament criticism,” wrote: “With Semler, the latest epoch of our times has begun.”³ Although he calls him a “great reformer of theology,” this “reformation” did not lie in a return to the Bible as it did in the sixteenth century but rather in a subordination of biblical

1. In 1719, Wolff published his *Vernünfftige Gedancken von Gott, der Welt und der Seele des Menschen, auch allen Dingen überhaupt* (Rational thoughts concerning God, the world, and the human soul, as well as all things), where he attempted to ground theological truths in mathematically verifiable claims.

2. See Canz, *Philosophiae Leibnitianae et Wolffianae usus in theologia per praecipua fidei capita*.

3. Eichhorn, *Allgemeine Bibliothek der biblischen Litteratur*, 93.

research to the canons of common literary criticism. Semler wrote, “A person can only claim that God performed some special supervision or guidance over the copying of Scripture (especially the New Testament) if they have thrown real life out of their head.”⁴ To which one could respond that a person can only assert that God did not provide this sort of oversight if they have thrown the providence of God out of their head. . . .

Within the practice of rationalist theology, Christian dogma is to be subject to critical reason and biblical texts are to be interpreted independently of systematic theology. Before this rationalist separation of historical biblical theology from dogmatics took over, the church had made no distinction between systematic and biblical theology or between New Testament theology and Old Testament theology. This distinction came with rationalism, yet it was only to be expected that it would not end with it. As philosophy developed in the course of history, theologians kept adapting biblical theology to current philosophical trends, which has continued through contemporary postmodernism. The history of the theology of the Hebrew Bible (previously known as Old Testament theology) investigates the historical development of the organization and analysis of themes pertaining to the theology of the Tanakh. Probably the most notable result of this development is the fact that Old Testament interpretation, formerly at the service of church dogmatics, now stands in opposition to dogmatics as “the Bible’s own voice.”

Theology of the Tanakh and the Early Church

Theology of the Hebrew Bible in the New Testament

The Holy Scripture of the early church was the Hebrew Bible, in its Greek translation called “the Septuagint” (LXX). The Christian interpretation of the Hebrew Bible was founded on the sayings of Jesus Christ and on the teaching of the apostles. Out of the twenty-seven New Testament books, only Philemon lacks any clear references to the Tanakh. There are several important New Testament texts which, by their very nature, voice what we might call an “Old Testament theology”:

- In Romans 4, we find a theology of Abraham’s righteousness by faith; one chapter later, a theology of original sin and human mortality. In chapters 9–11, there is a theological treatment of the history of Israel in relation to the church.

4. Semler, *Lebensbeschreibung II*, 125.

- 2 Corinthians 3 uses the term “old covenant” or “testament” (παλαιὰ διαθήκη), and it is from here that the entire Hebrew canon derives its Christian name.
- Paul’s letter to the Galatians discusses the difference between Yahweh’s covenant with Abraham and the Sinaitic covenant, which is replaced by the new covenant of Jesus Christ.
- The epistle to the Hebrews deals, first and foremost, with the position of Jesus Christ as the Messiah who, being the heavenly high priest, replaced the Aaronic priesthood. Another major theme is the role of the Mosaic law, which was fulfilled and superseded by the coming of the Messiah.
- In the Acts of the Apostles, we find a record of important theological interpretations of the Tanakh for church life: Joel’s prophecy concerning the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2; Stephen’s theological appraisal of the history of Israel in Acts 7; a crucial discussion concerning the relationship of the Jews and Gentiles with regard to circumcision in Acts 15. The book itself ends with Paul’s conflict with the Jews who are not receptive of the gospel.
- The Gospels find the authority of, and confirmation for, Christ’s messianic mission in the Hebrew Bible. It is precisely there that they trace the predictions about the divine origin of the life and work of Jesus Christ.

We need to remember that, even though the biblical theology of the Tanakh is a historical discipline and as such investigates the Tanakh “as though the New Testament did not exist,” for conservative theology the New Testament is the “Author’s” essential interpretation of his message.

Theology of the Hebrew Bible and the Church Fathers

After the apostolic period, the church began to interpret the Old Testament in a very “formalist,”⁵ apocalyptic,⁶ and allegorical⁷ manner. In interpreting the Tanakh, the early exegetes endeavoured to draw as close as possible to

5. E.g. the *Epistle of Barnabas* interprets the number of Abraham’s warriors (318) as a symbol of the cross, as the Greek numerical abbreviation for this number is $\tau\eta$. According to the author, the letter *tau* symbolizes the cross while the letters *iota* and *eta* are the initial letters of the name Ἰησοῦς .

6. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 417.

7. Allegorical interpretation developed mainly in Alexandria in the struggle against Gnosticism and Marcion.

the Greek philosophy:⁸ “A pagan tradition of hermeneutics provided Philo, Clement and Origen with techniques for extracting philosophical truths from the most unpromising material.”⁹ Origen (184/185–253/254) recognized a threefold sense of the Hebrew Bible in accordance with a trichotomic division of a human being into body, soul, and spirit. The body symbolizes, in his view, the literal sense of the text; the soul represents its moral sense; the spirit corresponds to the spiritual or mystical sense of the text. (Later on, the fourth sense – an anagogic/eschatological one – was added.)

Important for the text of the Tanakh was Origen’s text-critical work known as *Hexapla*. In essence, it was a comparative edition that included various Greek Bible translations with the Hebrew original, arranged in six columns extending over some six thousand pages. The first column contained the Hebrew text written in a Hebrew script. A transliteration of the Hebrew text into the Greek script occupied the second column. (At the time when the Hexapla was produced the Masoretic vocalization had yet to be invented.) The further four columns contained Greek translations: Aquila (extremely literal), Symmachus (freer rendering), LXX and Theodotion (revision of LXX). The Hexapla was most likely never copied further and was probably destroyed in AD 653 when the Arabs conquered Caesarea, where it was located.

Augustine (354–430), who significantly influenced the theological thought of Western Christianity, utilized, to a considerable degree, an allegorical method of interpreting the Old Testament. At first, Augustine was put off by the Hebrew Bible’s language and style.¹⁰ Not only did he doubt its veracity, but he also did not like the stories involving polygamy, plundering, incest and murder. He was influenced to take up allegorical exegesis by Ambrose, who “commended as a ‘rule’ for understanding the Scriptures, the Pauline statement that ‘The letter kills, but the spirit gives life’ (2 Cor 3:6).”¹¹ By “letter” Augustine meant a *literal* understanding of the text and by “spirit” his *metaphorical* interpretation. The claim that “when once the principle of allegory is admitted, when once we start with the rule that whole passages and books of Scripture say one thing when

8. Philo speaks about “philosophising according to Moses” (Yonge, *Works of Philo Judaeus*, 283) and, following his example, Clement of Alexandria wishes to cultivate a “philosophy according to Christ”: “philosophy more especially was given to the Greeks, as a covenant peculiar to them – being, as it is, a stepping-stone to the philosophy which is according to Christ.” Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Christian Library XII*, 342.

9. Procopé, “Greek Philosophy, Hermeneutics and Alexandrian Understanding of the Old Testament,” 452.

10. “They seemed to me unworthy to be compared to the stateliness of Tully.” *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, 33.

11. Norris, “Augustine and the Close of the Ancient Period of Interpretation,” 383.

they mean another, the reader is delivered bound hand and foot to the caprice of the interpreter”¹² rings true of Augustine at many places.

Augustine’s most important work on the interpretation of Scripture is *De doctrina christiana* (On Christian doctrine). Here, among other things, he subordinated exegesis to church dogmatics.¹³ Considerably influential, too, has been his theology of history, presented in the books XV–XVII of his *De civitate Dei* (The city of God). It is an interpretation based more on an apocalyptic understanding of previous time periods rather than a historical exegesis. Augustine’s theology of history had a lasting effect on the direction of Christian thought concerning church history in relation to the Hebrew Bible. As regards the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, probably most famous is his claim that “the New Testament is concealed in the Old, and the Old Testament made plain in the New.”¹⁴

Hebrew Bible and the Medieval Period

Though it is true that “the Bible was the most studied book of the middle ages,”¹⁵ until the time of Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) such study lay mostly in citation and systematic organization of interpretations by various church authorities – primarily patristic authors. On the one hand, one may observe in the Middle Ages something of a development towards a literal understanding of the Hebrew Bible.¹⁶ Even so, it is more accurate, overall, to conclude that the Medieval period “subordinated scholarship . . . to mysticism and to propaganda.”¹⁷ Ideological usage of the Hebrew Bible was meant to support, most of all, the imperialistic ambitions of the church led by the Pope. Being the “new Israel,” the medieval church used the Old Testament conquest narratives to justify its political and military activities. This being the case, one can hardly speak of biblical theology in the modern sense of the term. As regards Aquinas, we can say that his interpretation “always keeps the theological content of

12. Farrar, *History of Interpretation*, 239.

13. Augustine writes: “Now Scripture asserts nothing but the catholic faith, in regard to things past, future, and present [*Scriptura non asserit nisi fidem catholicam . . .*]” Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana*, 3:10.

14. “. . . in Vetere Novum lateat, et in Novo Vetus pateat.” Augustine, *Sancti Aurelii Augustini, Hipponensis Episcopi opera omnia*, 623.

15. Smalley, *Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages*, xi.

16. Froehlich, *Biblical Interpretation from the Church Fathers to the Reformation*, 555.

17. Smalley, *Bible in the Middle Ages*, 358.

Scripture in view and is attentive to working this out by means of drawing together other viewpoints.”¹⁸ His guiding principle was *humility*.¹⁹

Hebrew Bible and the Reformation

At a modern faculty of theology, Martin Luther (1483–1546) would be an Old Testament professor. His influence on the theology of the Hebrew Bible was determined by his great “discovery” – justification by faith.²⁰ For this reason, he treated the Hebrew Bible as a means of supporting the New Testament Christology,²¹ which sometimes led him to arbitrary interpretations of various Old Testament passages.²² As Kraeling states, “One definitely feels that if it were not for the use of the Old Testament made in the New Testament Luther might have veered farther in the Marcionitic direction.”²³ The tension which thus arose between the theology of inspiration of Scripture and the christological axiom of Old Testament theology had a strong impact on the subsequent development of a Protestant interpretation of the Tanakh.

John Calvin (1509–1564), a Reformer of the second generation, became an excellent Old Testament exegete. In his commentaries, he subordinated all philological, historical or other reflections to the main goal of *uncovering God’s message* in the text. Calvin’s importance for the theology of the Hebrew Bible lies primarily in his emphasis on the exegesis of the text in its original sense, such that some of his contemporaries even accused him of preaching Judaism.²⁴ In a paradoxical contrast to this accusation is a claim that “Calvin so Christianized the Old Testament that he almost lost sight of the newness of the Gospel.”²⁵ These two contradictory statements reflect two motives, which

18. Reventlow, *History of Biblical Interpretation*, 2:201.

19. “A humble mind, a desire to seek things out, a quiet life; much meditative thinking in silence, poverty, and living in a foreign land – all these features have a knack of revealing things that many folk find obscure.” Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, 1:288.

20. “The righteous [δίκαιος] will live by faith” (Rom 1:17).

21. “And in this all the right holy books will agree on one thing, namely that they all together *preach and exalt* Christ [Vnd daryn stymmen alle rechtschaffene heylige bucher vber eyns, das sie alle sampt Christum predigen vnd treyben].” Johannes Leipoldt, *Geschichte des neutestamentlichen Kanons II*, 65.

22. “Certain of [Luther’s] commentaries on the Old Testament showed that he was well aware of the importance of historical method in the study of Scripture, but despite this recognition he was apparently unable to see in the Old Testament writings anything approaching progression in the content of divine revelation.” Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 420.

23. Kraeling, *Old Testament since the Reformation*, 20.

24. Audin, *Calvin I*, 448.

25. Smith, *Old Testament Theology*, 28.

the theology of the Hebrew Bible must also respect today: (1) faithfulness to history; (2) Christian interpretation. Another fact which also proved important for the later development of the theology of the Hebrew Bible is that the so-called “covenant theology” (also known as *federal theology*) has its roots in Calvin’s theology.²⁶

Pietism: Christology Interpretation

Pietism, which came about as a response to the dry and polemical post-Reformation orthodoxy, placed a pious Christian life in the centre of theological attention, which, in turn, led to a clearer theoretical distinction between Old and New Testaments. The main impetus for a historical distinction between the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament came from Philipp Jakob Spener (1635–1705), who emphasized the importance of daily family reading of the Bible, but *especially of the New Testament*.²⁷ In his biblical hermeneutics, August Hermann Francke (1663–1727) distinguished the *sensus literalis* (literal sense) from the *sensus mysticus* (hidden sense) of the Biblical text: “In the ‘interpretation’ of the literal meaning one has to distinguish between the concrete intention of the author (*literalis*) and the hidden intention of God in the historical matters of fact (*mysticus*).”²⁸ This hidden meaning is found primarily in the typology of the Old Testament, which, in Francke’s view, is only comprehensible through Christ, who is “the Sum and Substance of All the Holy scriptures, in the Old and New Testament.”²⁹ This christological reading of the Hebrew Bible strives to turn away from lifeless dogmatic theology (called “dead orthodoxy”), though it runs the risk of being only superficially acquainted with the historical context of the actual texts. In the case of some pietistic theologians, an extreme form of spiritualization of the Tanakh was accompanied by other excesses which lead to unhealthy subjectivism and mysticism.³⁰

26. Bray, *Biblical Interpretation*, 204.

27. Spener, *Pia desideria*, 96.

28. Matthias, “August Hermann Francke,” 106.

29. Francke, *Christus sacrae scripturae nucleus: Or, Christ the Sum and Substance of All the Holy scriptures, in the Old and New Testament*.

30. “Decadence set in after the death of the leaders, and what had begun as a true work of God became marked by narrowness, poverty, and jejuneness of spirit.” Orr, *Progress of Dogma*, 290.

Calvinism: Federal Theology

During the period when the advances gained through the Reformation were being consolidated, reformed theologians (or “Calvinists”) began to use an important biblical idea of *covenant* as the central notion of systematic theology. This idea had a considerable influence on interpretation of the Tanakh as well. The origin of this concept is sometimes incorrectly attributed to the Dutch theologian Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669). In reality, however, it was the second-century author Irenaeus who had already distinguished between three biblical covenants: (1) a covenant written on a human heart, (2) a covenant of external commands and prohibitions (Sinai), and (3) a covenant restored in a human heart through the work of the Holy Spirit.³¹ Covenant as a theological problem of reformed theology also appears in Ulrich Zwingli’s (1484–1531) discussion with anabaptists³² and as a theme in the systematic theology of the reformed theologian Caspar Olevian (1536–1587).³³ At the end of the sixteenth century, the Scottish theologian Robert Rollock (d. 1599) wrote: “The whole of God’s word has to do with some covenant, for God does not communicate to man unless it be through a covenant.”³⁴ Subsequently, in his New Testament theology, Cocceius drew a distinction between three historical dispensations: (1) *ante legem*, (2) *sub lege*, and (3) *post legem*.³⁵ Covenant theology is important, mainly because it created favourable conditions for the later diachronic classification method used in studying the theology of the Hebrew Bible.³⁶ The temporal dimension of biblical theology also became the point of departure for the theology of salvation history (*Heilsgeschichte*).

31. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 292.

32. Lohfink, “Covenant,” 376.

33. Olevian’s work “on the essence of the covenant of grace between God and the elect” (*De substantia foederis gratuiti inter Deum et electos*) was published in 1585.

34. Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition*, 4:367.

35. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 292.

36. For Cocceius, “the Bible as a whole was to be considered as a legitimate object of study in its own right, and as a source that could inform – not merely support – the Christian faith.” Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 421.

3

Old Testament Theology as a Scientific Discipline

In the humanities, the idea of being *scientific* is closely related with the governing idea of *plausibility*, which in the public sphere (especially the scholarly realm) determines whether certain claims may be accepted as scientific or not. The plausibility of European modernity is predicated upon the successes of the natural, mathematical sciences – and on the failure of the Christian, Bible-based worldview – to reach a unified and indisputable consensus of faith. The ideal of Enlightenment philosophy was to adopt a mathematical argumentation method and thus reach the absolute certainty of rational knowledge – not on the basis of the revelation and authority of biblical prophets and apostles, but on the basis of rational arguments and general human experience. The idea of a medieval “science” (*scientia* – as opposed to *sapientia*) thus changed the notion of authority, such that “scientific” could only be regarded as that which was plausible and acceptable to the authority of *reason* and common analogical experience (without the authority of Scripture, miracles, and prophetic revelations). It is from here that this philosophy derives the name *rationalism*. Attempting to preserve its scientific status, university theology lagged behind contemporary philosophical trends: in the eighteenth century, rationalism; in the nineteenth century, romanticism and idealism; in the twentieth century, existentialism, structuralism, postmodernism, etc.

Here we must note that evangelical Christianity, whose early modern roots go back to the Methodist spiritual awakening in Great Britain, lays emphasis on a personal spiritual experience. Evangelical theologian Pavel Procházka states that “Christian faith finds its life in a personal experience.”¹ This experience, however, stands in direct contradiction to both intellectualism and dogmatism.

1. Procházka, *Teologické princípy v cirkevnej edukácii*, 102.

Its nature may be found in John Wesley's insistence that the Christian must possess not only a conceptual faith but also a personal and practical experience of the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In contrast to the empirical experience on which rationalism is based, Christianity is based on the experience of salvation, brought about by the power of the gospel and God's Spirit.

Rationalist Origins

In order to understand Old Testament theology, one needs to apply the same general principle of theological enquiry: the key to the method and argument of respective authors must be sought in their philosophical allegiances, which in turn provide a lens whereby they interpret the biblical text. In other words, conservative theology aims to subordinate the notion of plausibility to that of biblical authority, whereas critical theology interprets biblical texts in light of currently dominant ideas of plausibility. As any other simplification, this one, too, provides only a broad sketch of the overall problem, which cannot be applied to a specific theology in isolation. It does help, however, to understand the motives behind the origin of such a theology.

The history of Old Testament theology as a self-standing theological discipline only began in the philosophical rationalism of the Enlightenment period. Johann Philipp Gabler (1753–1826), in his inaugural lecture “*Oratio de justo discrimine theologiae biblicae et dogmaticae*” (Concerning the correct distinction between biblical and dogmatic theology),² defined biblical theology as a *historical science* whose aim was to describe “what the writers of the Old and New Testaments thought concerning divine things.”³ Gabler saw his role as a biblical theologian in accomplishing three tasks: (1) to become familiar with, first of all, the historical context (time period, author, cultural and political circumstances); (2) to analyze the historical texts as to their integrity; and finally (3) to separate historically conditioned views from timeless truth, which provides foundation for dogmatic theology.⁴ In 1790–1793, Gabler published Eichhorn's *Urgeschichte* (Prehistory) with his introduction and annotations. He depicts the Mosaic cosmogony as a “poetic painting” and, in the spirit of

2. University of Altdorf, 30 March 1787.

3. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 422. Gabler actual words (from Latin): “There is a genuine biblical theology that has a historical origin. It relates what the holy writers thought about divine matters. On the other hand, there is a dogmatic theology that has a didactic origin. It teaches what are the rational thoughts of a theologian about divine things, according to his ability, or according the times, age, place, sect, school, and other similar things.” Gabler, *Opuscula academica*, 183–184.

4. Anderson, *Contours of Old Testament Theology*, 17.

rationalism, adds: “I just cannot believe that Moses was the author of this message.”⁵

Thus, though rationalism did initiate stricter and more methodical thought, it applied to the Hebrew Bible such philosophical notions which led to the underestimation of – and at times even contempt for – the religion of Israel and literature of the Tanakh.⁶ Despite the fact that Gabler never wrote a systematic treatment of the theology of the Hebrew Bible, the statement he made on 30 March 1787 in his inaugural lecture at Altdorf University is generally considered to be the introduction to biblical theology of Scripture as a new discipline.

The Rise of Romanticism

In order to get a clear view of the history of nineteenth-century theology, it is important to understand, at least in part, the philosophical trends which contemporary scientific theology followed. The historian of biblical theology Hans-Joachim Kraus describes the development of theology in this period as “a great spiritual shift in an unbalanced wheel, on which the contemporaries could take part only if they did not want to force it to turn backwards.”⁷ This “wheel of history” was being moved “forwards” by scientific discoveries and secular philosophy. Towards the end of the eighteenth century, it was mainly Immanuel Kant’s critical idealism which provided a philosophical direction, especially for German protestant theologians and helped them determine what was to be believed in the Bible and what was not. For philosophy, this was the time of revolutionary changes. Reacting to Kant, the romantic philosophers began to question the authority of reason as well as the primary task of epistemology.⁸ Enlightenment philosophy absolutized reason, which called into question the authority of tradition, revelation, miracles and the inspiration of Holy Scriptures thus paving the way for skepticism or irrational fideism. In contrast, the romantic philosophers brought a metacritique of reason, which was lacking in Kant’s philosophy.

5. Gabler, *Johann Gottfried Eichhorns Urgeschichte*, xiv.

6. As an example of such “vulgar” rationalism, we might mention the work of George Loren Bauer, particularly his 1796 book *Theologie des Alten Testaments*. See Oehler, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 33.

7. Kraus, *Geschichte der historisch-kritischen Erforschung des Alten Testaments von der Reformation bis zur Gegenwart*, 87.

8. “In a fragment from 1796, Schlegel announces: ‘Philosophy in its proper sense has neither a first principle, nor an object, nor a definite task.’” Frank, *Philosophical Foundations*, 11.

The end product of this development was a philosophical romantic reaction, which – both in parallel with rationality and against exaltation of reason – emphasized the aesthetic of emotion, intuition, “inkling” (*Ahnung*) and mystery. While rationalists strove to explain the world and religion in an exhaustive manner, the philosophers and artists of romanticism acknowledged hidden, mysterious powers of the mythical past and unfathomed depths of human emotion, best expressed through art – particularly poetry and music. Through his philosophical critique, Kant opened the way for a radical subjectivism and individualism, even though he never developed these notions in a consistent manner.

For the romantics, religion was not a matter of divine authority, let alone a product of objective revelation. Rather, it had to do with one’s individual perception and inner experience or sentiment. Religion thus was not an object of *knowledge* but of *faith*, which was different from, if not entirely contradictory to, rational knowledge. The contradictory nature of this reaction to rationalism may be observed in the romantic admiration for two philosophers, namely the pantheist Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677) and the idealist Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814),⁹ the latter being more influential. The romantics were attracted to Fichte’s philosophy of the absolute freedom of the human “Self” on the one hand and to Spinoza’s apotheosis of nature as well as his scientific explanation of religion (based on the contemporary understanding of “science”) on the other. And yet, these two philosophers contradicted each other in many ways, and this contradiction is embedded in the foundations of romantic philosophy and theology.

The philosophy of Spinoza is consistently determinist and uncompromisingly defends the necessity of every event. By contrast, Fichte teaches absolute freedom and autonomy of the “Self.” He does away with Kantian borders between the noumenal and the phenomenal world, such that the subject knows no other limits than those which one sets for oneself.

Influenced by post-Kantian idealist philosophy, the romantics aimed to create a new religion and mythology, which would reflect the needs of the new humanity belonging to the new age. The Bible could serve as an example of Jewish mythology as well as an example for national religions, but the nations of Europe needed their own mythology which need not be contingent on its *historical* faithfulness (or even veracity); of real importance was to be its *poetic* or *imaginative* effect whereby the new man would create his new world in a Fichtean manner. In a similar vein, romanticism stressed the particularism of

9. Beiser, “Paradox of Romantic Metaphysics,” 219.

national culture with a special focus on mythology as a carrier of supra-rational meanings and poetic imagination.

The romantic developments in biblical theology were crucially influenced by Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), especially owing to his rehabilitation of mythology and emphasis on the importance of language in thought, as well as his study of Hebrew poetry. According to Herder, imagination and poetics *create* our world and so genetically precede reason.¹⁰ Herder influenced biblical theology of the Old Testament particularly with his work *Vom Geist der Ebräischen Poesie* (Concerning the spirit of Hebrew poetry, 1782–1783). The Bible, in his view, contains mythological “truth,” as “poetry connects beauty and truth and makes both come to life by means of sympathy [*mit teilnehmender Empfindung*].”¹¹ The Bible became the object of aesthetic attention, for which Herder has been likened to Luther and even called “John the Baptist of modern theology.”¹²

Wilhelm Martin Leberecht de Wette (1780–1849)

Probably the most famous theologian influenced by philosophical romanticism is Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768–1834), who also tends to be considered the founder of liberal theology. In biblical theology, specifically, radical historical criticism in concert with Herder-influenced romantic acceptance of mythology is connected with the name of Wilhelm de Wette. Although de Wette never wrote a systematic account of biblical theology of the Hebrew Bible, his historical-critical works on the Old Testament harken back to Herder’s understanding of mythology, which he saw represented in the Bible. In his biblical dogmatics (*Biblische Dogmatik*, 1831), he writes:

A dogma is the matter of reason, a symbol is a matter of sentiment, and a myth is a matter of fantasy. The first speaks through notions, the second through aesthetic images, and the third preferably through stories. The first is a subject of faith, the second of religious devotion, the third is a subject of neither of these but rather of a free poetic play [*freies Spiel der Dichtung*].¹³

In his introduction to the Bible, he sets forth to reflect on the historical setting, as well as the aesthetic value, of the respective Hebrew writings. This purpose

10. Horyna, *Dějiny rané romantiky*, 118.

11. Herder, *Vom Geist der Ebräischen Poesie*, 68.

12. Werner, “Herder, Johann Gottfried,” 47.

13. De Wette, *Lehrbuch der Christlichen Dogmatik I*, 35.

is considerably distorted by his rationalist remarks concerning the historical value of the Tanakh: “a complete and thoroughgoing criticism will show that not one of the historical books of the Old Testament has any historical value [*kein einziges von den geschichtlichen Werken des A.T. geschichtlichen Werth hat*].”¹⁴ In spite of this negative historical evaluation of the Old Testament, de Wette represents a revived interest in the historical development of the Old Testament religion, which, under Hegel’s influence, became a crucial aspect of theological thought. Meaning would no longer be identified in the very words of Scripture, or the authorial intent behind biblical texts, but rather in the external cultural reality which determines it.¹⁵ (This quasi-religious approach to history was later replaced by a relativist historicism of Troeltsch’s type.)

De Wette expressed his intention to connect historical-critical analyses of the Bible with the romantic *Zeitgeist* in the introduction to his novel *Theodor*, where the protagonist declares: “I wish to win over to my side those whose are still fit for a new start and a shift in their ideas, for a clear and yet deep, scientific and yet warmly spirited theology.”¹⁶ This connection of historical criticism with a religious conviction was facilitated by the philosophy of Jakob Friedrich Fries (1773–1843),¹⁷ who was a philosophical opponent of Hegelianism. In his work *Wissen, Glaube und Ahnung* (Knowledge, faith and inkling, 1805), he put the certainty of a spiritual experience on par with faith and knowledge. In his well-known book *Das Heilige*, Rudolf Otto states that Schleiermacher and de Wette introduced Fries’s philosophical doctrine to theology.

Of greatest consequence for the theology of the Hebrew Bible are de Wette’s work *Beytrag zur Charakteristik des Hebraismus* (1807) and *Über die Religion* (1828). The two-volume work *Beiträge zur Einleitung in das Alte Testament* (Halle 1806–1807) “inaugurated a new era in critical Old Testament scholarship.”¹⁸

Hegelian Evolutionism

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831), the most important representative of absolute idealism, determined the direction of the so-called “speculative theology” of the nineteenth century, which in turn attempted

14. De Wette, quoted in Rogerson, *W. M. L. de Wette*, 47.

15. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*, 79.

16. De Wette, *Theodor oder der Zweiflers Weihe*, viii.

17. Howard, *Religion and the Rise of Historicism*, 43.

18. Rogerson, *Old Testament Criticism in the Nineteenth Century*, 28.

to develop Christian theology as a necessary segment of the philosophy of absolute idealism. Especially salient in the development of philosophical evolutionism is Hegel's understanding of truth as a historically conditioned system of thought (*philosophy*), whose development led to absolute idealism. The notion of such a development then led to philosophical evolutionism. In philosophy, evolutionism existed prior to Darwin, who introduced it to biology and brought it to the attention of modern society. It received a new, *scientific* reverence and popularity in the nineteenth century due to Hegel's philosophy of history. Although Hegel's earliest writings do contain vitriolic anti-Christian remarks, he later reverted from this and included a new version of Christian religion in his philosophy,¹⁹ a religion whose evolutionary predecessor was, in his view, Judaism. In this manner, Hegel was able to become a Christian philosopher whose system came to be regarded as a fulfilment of the deepest sense of Christian religion.

The scholar responsible for bringing hegelianism into Old Testament theology, which had, since Gabler's time, endeavoured to interpret the Bible according to the philosophical, temporal plausibility, is Wilhelm Vatke (1806–1882). In 1835, he published *Die biblische Theologie wissenschaftlich dargestellt* (Biblical theology, scientifically presented),²⁰ which was, at the time, the most thorough treatment of the development of the Old Testament religion based on Hegel's understanding of history. He speculatively applied Hegel's dialectics (thesis, antithesis, synthesis) to the history of Israel and so anticipated the views of Wellhausen, who himself acknowledged his indebtedness to Vatke's work.²¹

The evolutionist interpretation of Israel's religion led to questioning the validity of the term "theology" in the discipline's designation. Heterogenous elements of biblical texts were regarded as evidence of the absence of a unified ideological or religious system behind the Old Testament canon. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, a considerable number of Old Testament theologians, influenced by the history of religions school

19. "The Phenomenology constitutes such a thorough victory over the forces of Christian theology that Hegel can easily afford to allow its emaciated veterans to sit at the foot of absolute Truth, honoring them only so that he may be seen as merciful as well as victorious." Solomon, *In the Spirit of Hegel*, 586.

20. According to Vatke, Israel's religion developed from the naturalist and astral religion of the Egyptians through a consciousness of personal spirituality towards the theology found in the prophetic books and Psalms of the Babylonian and Persian exile. "Vatke is, in fact, a text-book example of the dependence of a biblical theologian on a specific philosophical school." Sláma, *Nové teologie Starého zákona a dějiny*, 145.

21. "My research . . . is quite close to Vatke's method [*Art*], from whom I admit to have learnt most and best." Wellhausen, *Prolegomena zur Geschichte Israels*, 14.

(Religionsgeschichtliche Schule)²² and Wellhausen's critical synthesis, gave up on writing a systematic treatment of the theology of the Hebrew Bible and, instead, concerned themselves with a historical description of the Israelite religion (the term *theology* was considered inappropriate). The importance of Vatke for a Hegelian approach to biblical theology is well captured by Rudolf Smend (1851–1913):

The Hegelian dialectics facilitated, to an extraordinary degree, its layering and identification [*Zergliederung und Erfassung*] of biblical ideological spheres and the Hegelian philosophy of history enabled it to go beyond a constricted understanding of biblical religion, with which rationalism constrained its pupils. It captured the Old Testament history of religion not only as a logical process, in which every event finds its necessary place, but it also – owing to its interest in the broadest context and its penetrating understanding of the Old Testament literature – recognized the flow of this history in its reality of life.²³

Typical of this type of evolutionary Old Testament theology is the very first sentence in the work of Bernhard Stade: “By biblical theology of the Old Testament we mean the *history* of the Old Testament religion.”²⁴ In the literature review section introducing his *Biblical Theology of the Old Testament* (1903), Karl Friedrich Kautzsch rejected all the works written according to “untenable critical presuppositions,”²⁵ by which he meant the works written from a non-Hegelian philosophical-theological standpoint.

Empiricism in Biblical Theology

In philosophy, empiricism regards sensory experience as the primary source of knowledge. The empiricism in theology can be traced to psychologism,²⁶ which originated as a reaction to Hegel's philosophy. In this regard, it shares a

22. The school originated in the late eighties/early nineties of the nineteenth century in Göttingen, under the influence of the church historian Wilhelm Bousset (1865–1920). Its most important Old Testament theologian was Hermann Gunkel (1862–1932), the founder of form criticism.

23. Smend, *Lehrbuch der alttestamentlichen Religionsgeschichte*, 3.

24. Stade, *Biblische Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 1.

25. Kautzsch, *Biblische Theologie des Alten Testaments*, xi (published posthumously).

26. In the history of philosophy, the term “psychologism” is often used pejoratively. Here I use it only as “an epistemological thesis, which traces back all epistemological questions to some aspects of psychology.” Mohanty, “Psychologism,” 2.

common motive with romanticism, but this designation is historically related to psychology as an *empirical* science, whose origin is related to the publication of Wilhelm Wundt's (1832–1920) work *Grundzüge der physiologischen Psychologie* (1874).

As seen above, besides rationalism and its speculative Hegelian development, romanticism also existed as an influential movement in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, stressing emotion, experience and an aesthetic perception of the world, as well as transcendental reality. The beginnings of romantic thought are typically traced to Rousseau, Herder, Goethe and Fichte. In theology, romanticism found expression as something of a counterbalance to rationalist and Hegelian speculation in Schleiermacher's emphasis on the religious *sentiment*. In romanticism, religion transcends reason and cannot be identified with the human consciousness (*spirit*) of Hegelianism.²⁷ Schleiermacher's pupil whose epistemological theories were the first ones to be referred to by the term *psychologism*²⁸ was Friedrich Eduard Beneke (1798–1854), although – unlike Wundt – his psychology was not of an empirical nature. Empiricism in theology, therefore, is more closely related to Wundt's newer psychologism.²⁹ The combination of the romantic concept of religion with archaeological discoveries, neo-Kantian anti-metaphysics and the development of the discipline of religious studies³⁰ brought to the exegesis of the Hebrew Bible such hermeneutical theories as had already appeared in the works of Schleiermacher and Dilthey. Hermann Gunkel (1862–1932), a representative of the history of religions school, and a follower of Schleiermacher,

sees the essential aim of all exegesis as the understanding of the writer – not his words (“words are the means of expression of thoughts and feelings”), but in the last resort not even his thoughts or feelings either (“thoughts and feelings are the expression of the soul stirred to life”), but his personality. So the living person, in its willing and thinking, in the manifold nature of all its spiritual

27. “[W]hat Spirit does cannot be identified through intelligibility. On the contrary, Spirit spells the irrational, the inexplicable; it marks what cannot be grasped by an effort of the mind – it is supernatural.” Roy A. Harrisville, introduction to *The Influence of the Holy Spirit*, by Hermann Gunkel, viii.

28. Erdmann, *Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie*, 636.

29. The difficult question concerning the degree to which the “accusation” of psychologism on the part of various philosophers is genuinely warranted lies beyond the parameters of this work, which focuses on the theological application of philosophical presuppositions.

30. Rudolph, “Religionsgeschichtliche Schule,” 7706.

being, is the real object of all exegesis. For: The soul of man, the mysterious inner life . . . is what is really precious.³¹

The history of religions school “was opposed both to a purely philological and historical biblical exegesis and to the sort of traditional dogmatic ‘biblical theology’ [that was] bound to the canon. . . . Instead of this it sought to understand and present the biblical religion of the two Testaments in the historical context it shared with other religions.”³² It is all the more understandable, then, that we will not find many works here entitled “Old Testament theology.”

Ernst Troeltsch (1865–1923) was considered to be the systematic theologian and dogmatician of this period.³³ Notwithstanding the fact that he highly esteemed the Hegelian works of Vatke, Kuenen, and Wellhausen,³⁴ it was Schleiermacher’s theology which he considered to be the first dogmatics to apply the method of the history of religions school,³⁵ where religion is not the necessary component of the human spirit (*Geist*), as it is in Hegel’s philosophy, but rather the result of an experience independent of metaphysics and morality. The point of departure of this “theology of experience” is, in fact, psychology.³⁶ The connection between psychologically construed religious experience and the history of religions is characterized well by the Scottish Old Testament scholar William Robertson Smith (1846–1894):

The great pre-eminence of the Bible history is that in it God speaks – speaks not in the language of doctrine but of personal grace, which we have a right to take home to us now, just as it was taken by His ancient people. In a word, the Bible is a book of Experimental Religion, in which the converse of God with His people is depicted in all its stages up to the full and abiding manifestation of saving love in the person of Jesus Christ.³⁷

31. Reventlow, *Problems*, 7.

32. Reventlow, 9.

33. Troeltsch, *Gesammelte Schriften II*, 500.

34. Troeltsch, 17.

35. All the same, the Religionsgeschichtliche Schule as a movement only arose more than half a century later.

36. “Contemporary religious studies hold on to what undoubtedly and factually exists and is the object of real experience, the very subjective religious consciousness. Distrust towards ecclesiastical and rationalist dogmas rendered any other approach impossible. That means that here, as elsewhere, the spirit of empiricism totally prevailed. Empiricism in this subject area means psychological analysis.” Troeltsch, *Psychologie und Erkenntnistheorie*, 6.

37. Smith, *Old Testament in the Jewish Church*, 14.

Smith was a pupil of Kuenen and Wellhausen and became a pioneer of Old Testament biblical criticism in the British Isles. All the same, he was convinced that “the living God is as present in the critical construction of the history as in that to which tradition has wedded us.”³⁸

Conservative and Mediating Theology in the Nineteenth Century

Hans-Joachim Kraus states that “the notion and idea of biblical theology could have come about only on the basis of the Reformation principle *sola scriptura*.”³⁹ The first work based on the Old Testament was fully subordinated to dogmatic purposes,⁴⁰ “to attain a more correct understanding of the Old Testament without any benefit” – so goes a remark of one nineteenth-century author.⁴¹ Such judgement from a non-conservative theologian is also more or less applicable to those authors who subjected their research to reformed Christian doctrines and thus did not meet Gabler’s requirement of keeping historical (biblical) theology separate from dogmatics:

Some form of a critically reconstructed Old Testament has become a new scholarly orthodoxy. Those who resisted the tide, such as C. F. Keil, a Lutheran professor and prolific writer in Dorpat, have been largely forgotten by contemporary scholarship, despite the fact that almost one hundred years after his death his major works are still in print.⁴²

The Lutheran theologian Carl Friedrich Keil (also known as Johann Friedrich Karl Keil, 1807–1888), mentioned above by Armerding, rejected the results of biblical criticism, and considered the developments of nineteenth-century liberal theology erroneous. His endeavour was to “defend, through organic division of material in the Old Testament introduction, which does not follow the sequential schema of origins and tradition-historical layering of the Old Testament, such a level of theological science that would provide the essential foundations for historical, dogmatic, and apologetic appropriation of the

38. Smith, viii.

39. Kraus, *Die biblische Theologie, ihre Geschichte und Problematik*, 17–18.

40. Wigand, *Syntagma, seu corpus doctrinae veri et omnipotentis Dei, ex veteri Testamento tantum, methodica ratione, singulari studio, fide et diligentia collectum, dispositum et concinatum*.

41. “. . . für eine richtigere Auffassung der alttest. Offenbarung ohne Ertrag.” Diestel, *Geschichte des Alten Testaments in der christlichen Kirche*, 290.

42. Armerding, *Old Testament and Criticism*, 1.

revealed Old Testament religion.”⁴³ Even though Keil has been more or less ignored by Old Testament scholars, he is well-known for the commentary on the Old Testament which he co-authored with Franz Delitzsch (1813–1890), who is more in line with the theologians standing between radical criticism and radical orthodoxy.

Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg

Probably the most famous proponent of traditional orthodoxy was Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg (1802–1869), a militant opponent of rationalism at various theological faculties. Since his childhood, he had an uncanny talent for languages (he had translated Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* before he turned twenty) and studied oriental languages at the University of Bonn. It was probably during his stay in Basel, where he was in contact with pietistically inclined missionaries whom he taught Hebrew, that he had an experience, which “turned a prospective orientalist into a genuine theologian and from the disciple of Aristotle, Kant, and Fries a Christian, who found the source of eternal truth in the word of God.”⁴⁴ He then became the professor of Old Testament at the University of Berlin, where he was also the leading figure in Prussia’s confessional Lutheran movement. The historian Philip Schaff describes him as “one of the most unpopular and yet one of the most important and influential men in the kingdom of Prussia.”⁴⁵ For more than forty years he served as the editor of *Evangelische Kirchen-Zeitung*, the journal which he himself founded and to which he regularly contributed pieces concerning not only theological matters but also church politics. His works on the Old Testament were being translated to English already during his lifetime.

Although he wrote a considerable number of commentaries on the Hebrew Bible, Hengstenberg’s most important biblical theological work is his *Christology of the Old Testament* (1829–1835).⁴⁶ His interpretation of the Messianic prophecies was influenced by his personal conversion experience as well as his apologetic motivation to defend a confessional approach to biblical interpretation.

43. Keil, *Lehrbuch der historisch-kritischen Einleitung in die kanonischen Schriften des Alten Testaments*, iii.

44. Bachmann, *Ernst Wilhelm Hengstenberg: Sein Leben und Wirken*, 1:170.

45. Schaff, *Germany*, 300.

46. Hengstenberg, *Christologie des Alten Testaments und Commentar über die messianischen Weissagungen der Propheten*.

Hengstenberg's views on church and state legislation (supporting the Lutheran state church) and theology (anti-rationalism),⁴⁷ as well as his public influence, enticed intense acrimony,⁴⁸ so that his theological views were largely ignored. All in all, Hengstenberg's lasting significance on the theology of the Hebrew Bible lies in his effort towards a Christ-centred exegesis of every book of the Tanakh.

Theology of Salvation History (Heilsgeschichte)

Between the radicalism of Hengstenberg's kind and the speculative theology that bridged various philosophical movements are the theologians of the Erlangen school, which attempted to integrate Hegel's philosophy of history and Schleiermacher's emphasis on religious sentiment with confessional Lutheranism. As regards biblical theology, the most important representative of this movement is Johann Christian Konrad von Hofmann (1810–1877). Unlike the conservative theologians, he rejected the verbal plenary inspiration of the Bible as well as the classical doctrine of Christ's substitutionary atonement.⁴⁹ In his view, theology's first point of departure is the experience of being born again (*Wiedergeburt*),⁵⁰ while the second is the salvation history (*Heilsgeschichte*)⁵¹ recorded in the Bible. In contrast to speculative theology, he placed religious

47. Concerning criticism of the Pentateuch, Hengstenberg wrote: "Such a work as the Pentateuch can be maintained as genuine, only as long as it is expounded as a sacred book. An inability to penetrate its depths – the exposition of it as a profane author – the diluting of its meaning, contain (in the germ) the denial of its genuineness; and if this is not immediately developed, it is a mere inconsequence, which the course of events will set aside; for every tendency will, sooner or later, arrive at maturity. If the Pentateuch, in reference to its doctrines and its spirit, do not rise above the level of Nature – if this spirit is not acknowledged as the greatest of miracles – if recourse must be had to faint forced apologies in order to remove the great stumbling-blocks – external miracles and prophecies will not then rescue it, but will rather serve to hasten its downfall." Hengstenberg, *Dissertations on the Genuineness of the Pentateuch*, 2.

48. Hengstenberg was being accused of "Pietism, a dead orthodoxy, obscurantism, fanaticism, Jesuitism, sympathy with every influence for retrogression." Bachmann, "Hengstenberg, Ernst Wilhelm," 224.

49. "Hofmann, indeed, only wished to teach old truth in a new form, but a glance at his system shows the serious extent of the neology in his teaching." Pfeleiderer, *Development of Theology in Germany since Kant*, 173.

50. "Being born again" is meant here as a process of subjectivization, which had been taking place in philosophy (and subsequently in theology) at least since the Renaissance period. It is not to be confused with the New Testament evangelical emphasis on the personal experience of repentance and coming to faith in Jesus Christ.

51. "In German the word bears the double sense of both 'saving history' and 'history of salvation,' and is nowadays widely used to refer to those saving acts of God in human history which are recorded in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments." Richardson, *Bible in the Age of Science*, 122.

experience at the centre of attention,⁵² calling it the “rebirth.” This rebirth was the goal to which biblical *Heilsgeschichte* led: “What a historical reality is gets lost here owing to what meaning it has or might have.”⁵³ Biblical history thus becomes the object of theological investigation which easily succumbs to pure speculation. It is no wonder, then, that the term “salvation history,” which Hofmann was the first to use,⁵⁴ became a fruitful concept for theologians of diverse convictions.

In his interpretation of Scripture, Hofmann put a stronger emphasis on the historical events recorded therein than on the text. As to history itself, he regarded it as a living image of the coming Messiah – a *vaticinium reale*, that is, a great foreshadowing of New Testament history comprised of real events.⁵⁵ The theology of salvation history is close to an evangelical understanding of biblical theology, “since to limit revelation would mean to reject the reality of the events of incarnation and atonement.”⁵⁶ Some evangelical theologians stress the revelation of the text, while others place the revelation between history and the text of Scripture.

Hofmann’s close associate and friend in Erlangen was Franz Delitzsch (1813–1890), best known for his translation of the New Testament into Hebrew as well as his commentary on the Tanakh (co-authored with Carl Friedrich Keil), which is still in print. His exegesis implements Hofmann’s theology of *Heilsgeschichte*.⁵⁷

Gustav Friedrich Oehler (1812–1872), whose work has probably had the longest-lasting influence of all works produced by the nineteenth-century conservative movement,⁵⁸ applied the *Heilsgeschichte* method in his theology

52. “[A] point of departure in the Christian’s experience of the relation to God has earned him the reproach of anthropocentrism, of describing the human without restriction as subject of the entire theological enterprise.” Harrisville and Sundberg, *The Bible in Modern Culture*, 143. This prominent positioning of experience in theology led Barth to conclude that Hofmann was Schleiermacher’s spiritual offspring (see Barth, *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century*, 594).

53. Diestel, *Geschichte*, 699.

54. The concept of “salvation history” is present already by Irenaeus, but Hofmann was the first one to term it *Heilsgeschichte*.

55. Delitzsch, *Die biblisch-prophetische Theologie, ihre Fortbildung durch C. A. Crusius und ihre neueste Entwicklung seit der Christologie Hengstenbergs*, 175.

56. Madar, “Zjavenie a dejiny, dejiny spásy,” 54.

57. “The author [i.e. Delitzsch himself] directed onto the correct path through Hofmann’s work *Weissagung und Erfüllung* has everywhere before his eyes the task of an Old Testament exegete, which is to point out in the human side of Scripture that which is divine and to affirm the history of Israel as being the prehistory of Christ.” Delitzsch, *Commentar über die Genesis*, 61.

58. Mead, *Biblical Theology*, 33.

of the Old Testament (published posthumously). Oehler defines the theology of the Hebrew Bible as a “historical-genetic presentation of the religion revealed in the Old Testament.”⁵⁹

Herman Schultz (1836–1903), a representative of Ritschl’s school, divided his *Alttestamentliche Theologie*⁶⁰ into two parts: (1) the development of Israel’s religion, (2) the awareness of salvation and the religious outlook of Israel as a consequence of the history of the religion of the people (*Volk*). It is an expression of the tension between the historical conception of the Tanakh as a history of Israel’s religion and its theological interpretation as a coherent belief system.

Conclusion

We may conclude our discussion of the nineteenth century with a characteristic feature found in one introduction to a popular treatment of the Old Testament prophets, written by one of the late nineteenth-century German theologians, Carl Heinrich Cornill:

No branch of science, in the last generation, has undergone such a profound revolution as that of Old Testament research. In place of the traditional representation of the religious history of Israel has been substituted a rigorous historical mode of view, which discovers in the process in question an organic development, and assigns to each event its logical position in the whole, by reference to which all the facts are severally comprehended and explained. At first, even professional scholars received this organic view of the Old Testament with repugnance and distrust; for it was no light task to abandon a position that for two thousand years had been regarded as the absolute truth.⁶¹

The development of theological thought may be further observed in another of Cornill’s Old Testament texts (published in 1908), in which he complains about what he calls “the most modern gnosis, which sees the world’s salvation in ancient oriental mysteries.”⁶² He had to face criticism for not being sufficiently critical and, as regards Panbabylonism, he assumed a moderate position:

59. Oehler, *Prolegomena zur Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 1.

60. According to G. Ernest Wright, “perhaps the greatest work in Old Testament theology produced during the last century.” Wright, *God Who Acts*, 33.

61. Cornill, *Prophets of Israel*, v.

62. Cornill, *Einleitung in die kanonischen Bücher des Alten Testaments*, v.

“Despite all the funereal talk of the Wellhausen school, I do not regard myself as being in a sinking ship to be, at last, devoured by the waves of Panbabylonism. On the contrary, I am convinced that one’s brave labour is never in vain.”⁶³

63. Cornill, viii.

4

Theology of the Tanakh in the Twentieth Century

In the world of ideas and theology, the twentieth century only begins after World War I. The worldwide catastrophe cast a serious shadow of doubt, on the part of the Western world, over the possibility of making the Kingdom of God an earthly reality through social and culture reforms¹ – and exporting those reforms to the European colonies. Thus, theology, too, was part and parcel of the post-war ideological and cultural “leaven.” As regards systematic theology, the post-war years gave rise to dialectical theology, with Karl Barth as its most prominent representative. In Old Testament theology, voices arose immediately after the war calling for a return to the very task of the *theology* of the Old Testament.² In a posthumously published work, the leading Scottish Old Testament scholar Andrew B. Davidson (1831–1902) notes: “It will appear that, though we speak of Old Testament Theology, all that we can attempt is to present the religion or religious ideas of the Old Testament.”³ After the World War I, the situation changed when Rudolf Kittel (1853–1929), at the 1921 colloquium of orientalist in Leipzig, made the following statement in his lecture to Old Testament scholars:

Not even general religious studies or religious history can be exhausted by the mere description but only by the very phenomenology of a religious life. It must proceed further, towards

1. Smith, *Old Testament Theology*, 37.

2. “The one result of this transformation which here concerns us is the evident inability of large sections of the Church to take the Old Testament seriously as a primary revelation of God, of the nature of man and his institutions in human society, and of the Divine purpose in universal history. The scholarly study of the Old Testament has been separated from that of the New and from its mooring in the proclamation of the Church.” Wright, *God Who Acts*, 15.

3. Davidson, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 11.

a religious-systematic, i.e. religious-philosophical, presentation of the essence and core of religion and its truth. In the end, it must attempt to seek out the secret of its divine power [*Geheimnis ihrer Gotteskraft*]. Only this can be regarded a true scientific study of religion [*Religionswissenschaft*].⁴

Kittel speaks here of *religious studies*, but the context makes clear that he means what we would call *theology of the Hebrew Bible*. His challenge expressed a realization of a past diversion from the original task of theology. As Petr Sláma states, “Kittel’s speech led to a genuine shift in Old Testament studies and the interwar Old Testament theologies are a direct response to this impetus.”⁵

In 1925, Carl Steuernagel (1869–1958)⁶ proposed that a systematic study of Old Testament theology be based always on a historical analysis and so refrain from using categories derived from philosophy or dogmatics.⁷ In the interwar period, there was a continual increase in the number of published works devoted to the *theological* issues in the Tanakh.⁸ In Germany, this revival correlated with a renewal of confessional theology. Brevard Childs declares that “the period from 1930 to 1960 can well be called the golden period of Old Testament theology.”⁹

As seen in previous chapters, two basic methodological approaches developed in regards to the theology of the Hebrew Bible:¹⁰ (1) a dogmatic-confessional approach, which investigates the Hebrew Bible from the perspective of Christian dogmatics and New Testament interpretation, and (2) a historical-philosophical one, which assumes a neutral stance to dogmatics

4. Kittel, “Die Zukunft der Alttestamentlichen Wissenschaft: Ein Vortrag gehalten auf dem Ersten Deutschen Orientalistentag in Leipzig (Sondertagung Der Alttestamen Forscher) am 29. Sept. 1921,” 96.

5. Sláma, *Nové teologie*, 162.

6. The author of the oft-republished textbook *Hebräische Grammatik, mit Paradigmen, Literatur, Übungsstücken und Wörterverzeichnis* and of the influential Old Testament introduction *Lehrbuch der Einleitung in das Alte Testament, mit einem Anhang über die Apokryphen und Pseudepigraphen*.

7. Ollenburger, Martens, and Hasel, *The Flowering of Old Testament Theology*, 16.

8. A remark from 1953: “So far as the Old Testament is concerned, it is important to observe that during the last thirty years there has been a growing interest in its theology.” Rowley, *Unity of the Bible*, 4.

9. Childs, “Old Testament Theology,” 294.

10. In the first method, the “concepts and notions stemming out of Christian dogmatics are simply transposed back to the Old Testament period in such a way as to analyze Israel’s religion in their light,” whereas, in the second method, “every individual view must be understood in light of its own day and age and its gradual development.” Sellin, *Beiträge zur israelitischen und jüdischen religionsgeschichte*, 1.

and Christian faith and interprets the Tanakh in the context of philosophical plausibility.¹¹ These two main types of systematic analysis continued to be applied to Old Testament theology, with both sides accepting, to various degrees, the “assured results” of biblical criticism as it developed in the nineteenth century. Somewhere between them, one may observe a dialectical theology, which, though accepting the results of historical-critical method, nonetheless considers the Bible a witness to God’s revelation in which one, in a distinct way, encounters the word of God.¹² Barth’s *Kirchliche Dogmatik* contains so many exegetical passages that its author is occasionally regarded as a representative of biblical theology, even though his stance toward its programme was skeptical.¹³

The “Golden Age” of Old Testament Theology

The designation of this period as the “golden age” is rather paradoxical, seeing that, after the year 1930, Germany was taken over by the Nazis and the concomitant antisemitism which culminated in the extermination camps. For the so-called “confessing church” (*Bekennende Kirche*), which stood in opposition to the Protestant Reich church (*Deutsche Christen*), this was a time that Ján Liguš describes as an internal theological crisis in relation to both the political and the ecclesiastical government.¹⁴ If, despite all this, Childs speaks of the “golden age,” we are likely to be dealing with a paradox of the kind which tends to occur during such times in church history when the pressure of adverse political and historical circumstances leads to a deeper reflection on the very meaning of the Christian message.

11. In the twentieth century, it is much more difficult to link respective theologies to the philosophical movements from which they emanate. On the one hand, biblical theology became a largely self-standing and independent discipline, which no longer uses terms that would easily betray its underlying worldview. On the other hand, it must be noted that only very few authors act in such an epigonic manner as to expose the secular exemplars which they use for their philosophical anchoring – unlike their early nineteenth-century predecessors.

12. “All relevant, historical questions must be put to the biblical texts, considered as witnesses in accordance with their literary form. . . . When the foolish pursuit of an historical truth *supra scripturam* is on all sides abandoned in favour of a circumscribed investigation of the *veritas scripturae ipsius*, then we can and must give the freest possible course to critical questions and answers as demanded by the character of the biblical witness as a human document, and therefore an historical quantity.” Barth, *Church Dogmatics I/2*, 494.

13. “Barth, like his contemporary Brunner, had a sceptical attitude towards the twentieth-century ‘revival’ of biblical theology and in no sense felt indebted to it or dependent on it.” Barr, *Concept of Biblical Theology*, 413.

14. Liguš, *Christus Praesens*, 103.

Eduard König: *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (1922)

The first post-war theology of the Hebrew Bible was published by Eduard König (1846–1936). Although some authors have referred to König's theology as an "old fire"¹⁵ or "Indian summer"¹⁶ of nineteenth-century conservative theology, Walther Eichrodt noted that its publication was "a real act of courage"¹⁷ in a situation when Old Testament theology had been replaced with the history of Israel's religion. König refused to reduce theology to history, and so combined historical (diachronic) and systematic (synchronic) methods.

In his *Old Testament Hermeneutics*, König warns against several interpretive risks. Besides allegorisation, psychologisation, poetisation, mythologisation, Judaisation and Christianisation, he also warns against subordinating interpretation to philosophical trends. As we have seen, this was the problem of systematic biblical theological studies in the nineteenth century. König briefly criticizes Kant's view that religion must be stripped of metaphysics. In a similar vein, he rejects explanations of the whole religious phenomenon as an outcome of religious sentiment, although he does not explicitly refer to Schleiermacher. He concludes by stating that, for an interpreter of the Old Testament, it is "wrong to presuppose both that the divine activity in history is impossible and that the Old Testament knows neither natural causes nor laws of nature or that it describes the world 'as the divine nature' and hence reflects pantheistic thought."¹⁸

It seems that this warning against the domination of philosophy in theology – specifically in the biblical theology of the Old Testament – was more applicable to biblical theology than systematic theology, for even though we may observe the influences of existentialism, the philosophies of language and later postmodernism there, none of its significant authors followed their philosophical outlook with the consistency that Hegel, Kant or Schleiermacher had done.

15. Dentan, *Preface to Old Testament Theology*, 62.

16. Reventlow, *Problems*, 11.

17. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 1:31.

18. König, *Hermeneutik des Alten Testaments, mit spezieller Berücksichtigung der modernen Probleme*, 168.

A Return to Dogmatics

Ernst Sellin: *Theologie des Alten Testaments auf religionsgeschichtlicher Grundlage* (1933)

Ernst Sellin (1867–1945) is a major representative of a twentieth century dogmatic approach to analyzing the theology of the Tanakh.¹⁹ His framework is something of a return to the topical division of the Old Testament based on Christian dogmatics. It does not deny a historical analysis of the Old Testament as a *religious history* (as is clear from the title of his work) but investigates the biblical themes from the perspective of theological ideas and Christian dogmas.

Sellin's theology consists of two parts – historical and systematic. In its historical aspect, he deals with the development of Israel's religion from the standpoint of God's revelation and his manifold self-expression in the life of Israel. The systematic element is divided according to dogmatics: (1) the Old Testament doctrine of God and his relationship to the world, (2) the Old Testament doctrine of the human condition and sin, and (3) the Old Testament doctrine of God's judgement and salvation.

Ludwig Köhler: *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (1936)

Like Sellin, Ludwig Köhler (1880–1956) applied a dogmatic approach to the analysis of Old Testament material.²⁰ In a very brief manner, he only deals with those Old Testament themes which he regards as theologically important.²¹ He organized the entire material into three sections, named according to dogmatic categories: (1) God, (2) the human condition, (3) judgement and salvation. Köhler rejected the Old Testament cult, considering it to be a human attempt to save oneself.²²

19. Sellin defines the task of the Christian theology of the Old Testament as follows: "The Christian theology of the Old Testament ought to present systematically the religious teachings and faith of the Jewish community [*Gemeinde*] built upon the foundation of the Scriptures, which were collected between the fifth and the second centuries before Christ and declared sacred – but only insofar as Jesus Christ and his apostles regarded them as the bedrock for their gospel and the revelation of the God whom they proclaimed." Sellin, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 1.

20. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 1:34.

21. "One may give a book the title 'Old Testament Theology' if it manages to bring together and to relate those ideas and thoughts and concepts of the Old Testament which are or can be important [*theologisch erheblich sind oder es sein können*]." Köhler, *Old Testament Theology*, 7.

22. Section fifty-two of Köhler's theology is entitled *Die Selbsterlösung der Menschen: der Kultus*. Köhler, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 169.

Eichrodt and von Rad

Walther Eichrodt: *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (1933)

The Swiss scholar Walther Eichrodt (1890–1978) and his German contemporary Gerhard von Rad (1901–1971) represent two paradigmatic approaches to the theology of the Hebrew Bible, and both of them had a major impact on the subsequent development of Old Testament theology. Eichrodt's is a model of theology which presupposes a coherent structure of biblical faith – notwithstanding the fact that he accepts the results of Wellhausenian criticism. By contrast, von Rad denies the presence of such a theological structure in the Old Testament, and instead focuses on the development of theological ideas within salvation history.

Even though Eichrodt's theology adapts a systematic rather than a historical method,²³ he also takes into account the historical dynamics of respective Tanakhic themes. His pioneering theology set out to defend the legitimacy of the theology of the Hebrew Bible as a discipline against its nineteenth-century opponents²⁴ and to re-organize the expressions of Israel's faith in such a way as to confirm its integrity in all the states of its historical development.²⁵ Eichrodt's systematic approach strives to be faithful to what he calls *Old Testament dialectics*, for, in his view, “we must avoid all schemes which derive from Christian dogmatics – such, for example, as ‘Theology – Anthropology – Soteriology,’ ‘ordo salutis’ and so on.”²⁶ This coupling of a systematic approach with the “dialectics” of the Tanakh's theological world created a new paradigm for further works which adapted this method.

Gerhard von Rad: *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (1957, 1960)

Gerhard von Rad (1901–1971) is one of the most important Old Testament theologians of the twentieth century.²⁷ He builds upon the idea of *Heilsgeschichte*, which was formulated by Hofmann, but sees major differences between his method and that of other theologians. His different approach to the task of Old Testament theology primarily lies in the application of form criticism,

23. “It is high time that the tyranny of historicism in OT studies was broken and the proper approach to our task re-discovered.” Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 1:31.

24. Childs, “Old Testament Theology,” 294.

25. “W. Eichrodt parted company with the traditional arrangement of doctrinal material . . . and asserted that [the Covenant concept] exercised a consistent influence over all other aspects of Old Testament religion.” Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 430.

26. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 1:33.

27. “Currently, Gerhard von Rad's two-volume Old Testament theology is the most excellent and most significant work within our discipline.” Kraus, *Biblische Theologie*, 133.

structural analysis and the tradition criticism of Albrecht Alt and Martin Noth.²⁸ Although he denies the existence of a theological centre of the Hebrew Bible, his point of departure is furnished by Israel's *confessions* concerning Yahweh's deeds, which are reworked "in the three gigantic works of the Hexateuch, the Deuteronomistic history, and the Chronicler's history."²⁹ The history of Israel can thus be considered the *centre* of his theology of the Hebrew Bible, even though he himself denies the existence of such. It needs to be kept in mind, however, that the history narrated in the Tanakh is merely *Israel's confession* adapted to the credal needs.³⁰

Von Rad refuses to analyze biblical *notions* or *ideas* throughout the entire Tanakh (as Köhler did), because, in his view, these notions were subject to a historical development. In the same vein, he rejects investigations into Israel's "world of faith."³¹

Conservative Theology

Geerhardus Vos (1862–1949): *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (1948)

The Dutch scholar Geerhardus Vos, also called by some "the father of Calvinist biblical theology," was a long-time professor at Princeton Theology Seminary. Although he studied theology in Berlin and Strasbourg in the 1880s, when theological faculties were dominated by liberal theology, he retained his beliefs in Christ's divinity, God's revelation and the inspiration of Scripture. In his 1894 inaugural lecture, he said:

In all the other sciences man is the one who of himself takes the first step in approaching the objective world, in subjecting it to his scrutiny, in compelling it to submit to his experiments – in a word, man is the one who proceeds actively to make nature reveal her facts and her laws. In Theology this relation between the subject and object is reversed. Here it is God who takes the first step to

28. Noth, *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien*.

29. Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:v.

30. "Old Testament religion is to all intents and purposes reduced to a series of thankful reminiscences concerning past historical events, and on this basis would seem to take little cognizance of such important themes as soteriology or divine judgment." Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, 434.

31. "The subject-matter which concerns the theologian is, of course, not the spiritual and religious world of Israel and the conditions of her soul in general, nor is it her world of faith, all of which can only be reconstructed by means of conclusions drawn from the documents: instead, it is simply Israel's own explicit assertions about Jahweh." Von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:105.

approach man for the purpose of disclosing His nature, nay, who creates man in order that He may have a finite mind able to receive the knowledge of His infinite perfections. In Theology the object, far from being passive, by the act of creation first posits the subject over against itself, and then as the living God proceeds to impart to this subject that to which of itself it would have no access.³²

He divides his theology of the Hebrew Bible into two main parts: (1) the era of Mosaic revelation and (2) the era of prophetic revelation. His biblical theological method is thus determined by historic progression. As Vos declares, “The principle of successive Berith-makings, as marking the introduction of new periods, plays a large role in this, and should be carefully heeded.”³³

In keeping with his confession of faith, Vos argues that the ultimate use of biblical theology is that which is absolutely out of the sphere of practical utility for a student, namely the glory of God.

Wilhelm Vischer: *Das Christuszeugnis des Alten Testaments* (1934, 1942)

Wilhelm Vischer (1895–1988) represents the apex of christocentric interpretations of the Old Testament³⁴ and, like Barth, could be accused of “Christomonism,”³⁵ as his work treats the Old Testament solely as a witness to Christ.³⁶ His christocentric interpretation of the Tanakh is overloaded by typological and allegorical exegesis.

Theodorus Christiaan Vriezen: *Hoofdlijnen der theologie van het Oude Testament* (1949)

The Dutch theologian Theodorus Christian Vriezen (1899–1981) wrote a theology of the Old Testament which he conceived as a Christian scholarly discipline.³⁷ Although he does not reject biblical criticism,³⁸ he demands that

32. Vos, *The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and as a Theological Discipline*, 6.

33. Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 25.

34. Hahn, *Old Testament in Modern Research*, 236. Although this appraisal was pronounced in the mid-twentieth century, Vischer’s christocentric theology still remains unsurpassed in this particular regard.

35. Hasel, *Old Testament Theology*, 178.

36. “The Old Testament says what [was] Christ is, the New says who [wer] Christ is – and this in such a way as to make clear that only he knows Jesus who also knows him as Christ and only he knows what Christ is who also knows that it is Jesus.” Vischer, *Das Christuszeugnis des Alten Testaments*, 7.

37. “In this book we start from the view that both as to its object and its method Old Testament theology is and must be a Christian *theological science*.” Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology*, 147.

38. Vriezen sees both opportunities and difficulties in the scientific study of the Old Testament. See Vriezen, *Outline of Old Testament Theology*, 19.

“the canon, too, must be submitted to the judgment of the preaching of Jesus Christ”³⁹ and connects the christocentric interpretation of Old Testament revelation with “assimilating the results attained by Old Testament scholarship in all its various aspects.”⁴⁰ He conceives the relationship between Old and New Testaments as being both in an *organic* unity with, and in a *historical* distance from, each other.⁴¹

Theology of the Tanakh after World War II

For the first 150 years of development, scholarly approaches to the theology of the Hebrew Bible were limited almost exclusively to Germany. Concerning this predominance of German protestant literature in the field of Old Testament theology, the Slovak Old Testament scholar Juraj Bándy observes: “It seems to me that the whole theological ‘sea’ is encapsulated within this significant ‘drop.’”⁴² Yet it must be noted that, after World War II, the epicentre of new approaches and methods slowly began to move to the English-speaking scholarly community, which may have been due to the status of English as the most widely used language.

Biblical Theology Movement

The Biblical Theology Movement was specifically American and markedly Protestant in its orientation.⁴³ It originated after World War II in an effort to construct a more positive theology, attempting to bridge the gap between fundamentalism and modernism. A major impact, too, had been the “rediscovery of the Bible” in the dialectical theology of Karl Barth and Emil Brunner. The two typical emphases of this theology are (1) the difference between Hebrew and Greek thought and (2) the unity of the whole Bible based on this Hebrew background.⁴⁴

The most well-known representative of this movement was George Ernest Wright (1909–1974), author of the influential book *God Who Acts* (1952),

39. Vriezen, 149.

40. Vriezen, 147.

41. Kraus, *Biblische Theologie*, 132.

42. Bándy, *Teológia Starej zmluvy*, 11.

43. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, 13.

44. Barr, *Semantics of Biblical Language*.

where he argues that biblical theology is not a propositional and systematic dogmatics. It is a theology of recital of God's acts.⁴⁵

The major critics of this movement were Brevard Childs, who took issue with the movement on the grounds of its insufficient theological basis, and James Barr, who criticized its ill-conceived underlying linguistic theory.⁴⁶

James Barr and biblical theology

In the last quarter of the twentieth century, biblical theology underwent major changes in status and respectability.⁴⁷ In the 1960s, virtually the singular originator of these changes was James Barr (1924–2006), an Old Testament scholar of Scottish origin, whose work *The Semantics of Biblical Language* enforced reevaluation of the movement's theological presuppositions:

the linguistic bearer of the theological statement is usually the sentence and the still larger literary complex and not the word or the morphological and syntactical mechanisms. The most important consequence of this arises because the sentence unlike the word is unique and non-recurrent. A language has a vocabulary, i.e. a stock of words which are constantly available and may be used again and again; but it does not have a stock of sentences. This has a manifold importance for the interpretation of the Bible. First of all, the question of distinctiveness of biblical thinking has to be settled at this level and not at the lexical level.⁴⁸

Barr is considered to be one of the most important biblical scholars of the twentieth century. Although he did not write a systematic work entitled "biblical theology," his *The Concept of Biblical Theology* boldly evaluates and presents possibilities for the development of biblical theology in the future. In his view, one of the important criteria which biblical theology ought to respect is natural theology.⁴⁹ As Barr states, "The most important reality, it would seem, is this: there is, within the Bible, an element which points towards a theological source or reality that lies outside the Bible."⁵⁰ Biblical scholars

45. Wright, *God Who Acts*, 11.

46. Barr, *Semantics of Biblical Language*. Barr's criticism was directed primarily at Thorleif Boman's book *Das hebräische Denken im Vergleich mit dem Griechischen*.

47. Barr, *Scope and Authority of the Bible*, 1.

48. Barr, *Semantics of Biblical Language*, 269.

49. In 1991, Barr gave the Gifford Lectures in Edinburgh, which were subsequently published as *Biblical Faith and Natural Theology*.

50. Barr, *Concept of Biblical Theology*, 494.

are thus not to concern themselves solely with a closed theological system consisting of Old Testament sayings or even the whole Bible, but are to take into account systematic theology as well. In Barr's view, Christian faith is not primarily related to a book but to God and Jesus.⁵¹

Canonical Criticism

Brevard Childs: *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (1985), *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (1992)

Brevard Childs (1923–2007) is important to current biblical theology because of his theoretical justification of the point of departure for biblical theology. This, in his view, ought not to lie in history or events, but in the final form of the biblical *canon*: “The materials for theological reflection are not the events or experiences behind the text, or apart from the construal in scripture by a community of faith and practice.”⁵²

Childs's programme of canonical criticism was met with considerable sympathy on the part of conservative theologians. The main difference between conservative approaches to the Bible and that of Childs is that the latter refuses to identify the Bible with revelation, because “the use of the term revelation in respect of the Bible entails a far greater threat than that envisioned by any of its recent critics.”⁵³ In this vein, it might be noted that, despite Childs's theoretical emphasis on the final form of the biblical canon, in his 1985 work he accepts the results of biblical criticism and deals with cultic matters and the priesthood only after the chapter on the prophets. Childs's influence on subsequent developments is well put by Rolf Rendtorff, who writes: “The final form of the Old Testament books and theological intentions which they express must be heeded in a completely different manner than it has been done in the Old Testament scholarship so far.”⁵⁴

Postmodernity in the Theology of the Tanakh

Walter Brueggemann: *Theology of the Old Testament* (1997)

Walter Brueggemann (1933–) represents a theology influenced by postmodernism and informed by social- and political-scientific, as well as

51. Barton, “James Barr and the Future of Biblical Theology,” 264–74.

52. Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context*, 6.

53. Childs, 26.

54. Rendtorff, *Das Alte Testament*, 138.

new literary-critical, theories. His theology reflects philosophical appraisals of language as an irreducible reality. The text creates “an alternative world that invites faithful imagination,”⁵⁵ based on which he is able to declare: “the utterance is everything.”⁵⁶ Saying that Yahweh is God who acts in history led, according to Brueggemann, to “acute epistemological embarrassment.”⁵⁷ Instead of a historical analysis, he utilizes rhetorical mediation according to which it is “social practice that generates, constitutes, and mediates Yahweh in the midst of life.”⁵⁸ Consequently, James Barr states that Brueggemann is getting too close to getting caught in a logical trap, where all one can say is “It’s only rhetoric. There is nothing behind it.”⁵⁹

Brueggemann’s theology seeks to conform to the contemporary concept of plausibility, moulded by pluralism, individualism and philosophical anthropocentrism. It is not based on the traditional ontological commitment, moulded according to the Bible, but rather relies on the psychological and poetic force of the religious language.

More Recent Themes in the Theology of the Hebrew Bible

“Biblical criticism has become bankrupt”⁶⁰ claims one observer of the development of biblical hermeneutics. Notwithstanding its “evangelistic zeal” for the critical ethos, historical criticism failed to replace traditional Christian faith in the authority of Scripture with a new *scientific* attitude that would succeed not only to call this authority into question but also to provide a suitable substitute. Hence, biblical scholarship has more recently turned towards literary criticism, psychoanalysis, social sciences, cultural studies, critical theory and other theories meant to replace the traditional “referential” belief by focusing on literary qualities, social location, psychoanalytical understanding or the political utility of the text:

Biblical commentaries are dotted with exotic terms like “concentric patterns,” “chiasm,” “narrational technique,” “reader response,” and other phrases borrowed from literary criticism. Traditional interpretations of cherished texts, worn by familiarity to the

55. Brueggemann, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, xi.

56. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 122.

57. Brueggemann, 574.

58. Brueggemann, 574.

59. Barr, *Concept of Biblical Theology*, 547.

60. Wink, *Bible in Human Transformation*, 1.

smoothness of clichés, have now fallen before the searching revision of feminist biblical scholarship. Concepts like “the fusion of horizons,” “authorial intentionality,” “explanation versus understanding,” and “textual referent,” once reserved to the rarified atmosphere of philosophical hermeneutics, have made their way into more popular discourse. Even study materials designed for lay Bible teachers have developed a certain hermeneutical finesse. For example, students are encouraged to bracket their “privileged status” and to read texts “through the eyes of the poor,” being warned not to overlook the social contexts and political intentions of biblical passages.⁶¹

Based on these modern hermeneutical theories and methods, scholars continually produce a significant volume of narrowly focused works within our subject area, though only very few have undertaken to write a whole system of biblical theology that could be entitled “Theology of the Hebrew Bible.”

Psychology in the theology of the Tanakh

With the rise of experimental psychology in the 1870s and psychoanalysis at the turn of the century, psychology went from being purely philosophical or religious to being considered a proper scientific discipline. For the theology of the Tanakh, it is interesting to note that Carl Jung and Sigmund Freud – both of whom were at its origin – also wrote works on various Old Testament theological topics. Freud (1856–1939), the founder of psychoanalysis, applied his psychoanalytical theories in his book *Moses and Monotheism*.⁶² The neurotic character of the Israelite and Jewish religion is being determined here by the collective recollection of Moses’s murder in the wilderness.⁶³ Carl Jung (1875–1961) applied his theory of archetypes in his book *Answer to Job*. For Jung, “The Book of Job only serves as a paradigm of a certain experience of God, who has a special significance for our time.”⁶⁴

The experience of God’s presence is a central theme in the biblical theology of Samuel Terrien (whose work has the suggestive subtitle *Toward a New Biblical Theology*).⁶⁵ Terrien works with the whole Bible – Old and New

61. Long, “Committing Hermeneutical Heresy,” 165.

62. Freud, *Der Mann Moses und die Monotheistische Religion*.

63. This suggestion was first made by Ernst Sellin in his *Mose und seine Bedeutung für die israelitisch-jüdische religionsgeschichte*.

64. Jung, *Antwort auf Hiob*, 11, 13.

65. Terrien, *Elusive Presence*.

Testaments – and, in his theology, operates with the fact that “knowledge of God points to a reality which at once includes and transcends intellectual disquisition. It designates the involvement of man’s total personality in the presence of Yahweh through the prophetic word, the cultic celebration, and the psychological mode of communion in faith.”⁶⁶ Within the Hebrew Bible, he proceeds chronologically from the epiphanic visitations in the patriarchal narratives through Sinaitic theophanies and God’s presence in the temple and prophetic visions to the Wisdom literature. He interprets the experience of God’s communication⁶⁷ psychologically, using the analogy of a mystical experience described in Georges Bernanos’s novel *Sous le soleil de Satan*, where one character experiences a borderline sense of joy “beyond which one cannot go without dying.”⁶⁸ He turns back because he realistically experiences the presence of God yet sees no one there. Thus, Terrien concludes that “psychology in the Hebrew epic is the intelligent handmaid of theology.”⁶⁹

Literary theory in the theology of the Tanakh

Henning Graf Reventlow attributes the beginnings of narrative theology to the famous work of René Wellek and Austin Warren, *Theory of Literature*.⁷⁰ As regards the philosophy behind this work, however, it is important to note that Wellek (1903–1995) was an active member of the formalist school known as the “Prague linguistic circle,” which, along with the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, developed the structuralist theory.⁷¹ One’s understanding of the philosophical background behind application of genre-taxonomy will be considerably enriched by a closer acquaintance with the philosophy of structuralism.

Wellek and Warren ascribed an “institutional” sense to the literary genres: “The literary kind is an ‘institution’ – as Church, University, or State is an institution. It exists, not as an animal exists or even as a building, chapel, library, or capitol, but as an institution exists. One can work through, express himself through, existing institutions, create new ones, or get on, so far as possible, without sharing in politics or rituals.”⁷²

66. Terrien, 40.

67. “The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend” (Exod 33:11).

68. Bernanos, *Sous le soleil de Satan*.

69. Terrien, *Elusive Presence*, 82.

70. Reventlow, “Modern Approaches to Old Testament Theology,” 227.

71. Fry, “Functions (Linguistics),” 205.

72. Wellek and Warren, *Theory of Literature*, 235.

Under the influence of literary theory, many interpreters came to regard the Tanakh (and, indeed, the entire Bible) as, first and foremost, a *narrative* with a decisive literary plot and artistic climax. At the same time, the biblical text is to be explained from the standpoint of its social embodiment, where it originally served a specific historical community. The text is not to be compared with and verified by external texts or data. The emphasis is, primarily, on “intertextuality,” on the basis of which “intratextual theology redescribes reality within the scriptural framework rather than translating Scripture into extrascriptural categories. It is the text, so to speak, which absorbs the world, rather than the world the text.”⁷³

An example of a narrative approach to the theology of the Tanakh is John Goldingay’s (1942–) three-volume *Old Testament Theology*, where the author works with a conviction that “this is not merely an aspect of the formal nature of the Scriptures, but that the form gives expression to something of substance.”⁷⁴

In a similar manner, and with a similar emphasis on the artistic aspect of the Tanakh, works the so-called “Amsterdam school.” Here the authors “delight in word plays, echoes and breaks in the flow [of text], which are, in their view, a sophisticated work of a genius author. The concept of the Bible as a clever composition is marked with an emphasis on its synchronic reading. It is a reading, which ‘plays by the rules’ of the final authors and accepts an offer to step into their narrative world.”⁷⁵ This method has also played a significant role in the work of the Czech Old Testament scholar Martin Prudký.

The current methodological approaches to the study of the biblical theology of the Tanakh are, in some aspects, useful for conservative interpretation of the Bible. They emphasize the long-overlooked features of biblical texts and focus on their literary and/or social taxonomy. Problems arise, however, when these approaches are meant to *fully replace* traditional beliefs in the truthfulness, historicity or normativeness of the Bible.

More radical approaches to the theology of the Tanakh

Radical theological schools are more wont to produce works within the realm of philosophical or systematic theology, given that biblical theology – regardless of how radically critical the practitioner’s method might be – still puts the Bible and the traditional canon into the centre of attention. The plurality of

73. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, 117.

74. Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology*, 16.

75. Sláma, *Nové teologie*, 322.

approaches using critical theory, psychoanalysis or political philosophy⁷⁶ normally do not lead to a systematic treatment of biblical theology, but utilize some of the Hebrew Bible's themes in order to develop sociological, psychological or political theories.

The monograph *Philosophical Interpretations of the Old Testament*, by the Japanese author Seizo Sekine, presents philosophical interpretations of the Hebrew Bible.⁷⁷ He deals with a wide range of philosophers from Kant and Kierkegaard to Lévinas and Derrida. For the study of the theology of the Tanakh, he puts forward valuable information concerning possible trajectories which connect, by analogy or contrast, philosophical and theological thought.

To illustrate, we might conclude with an example of Derrida's philosophical approach to reading the Hebrew Bible. When asked if he, being Jewish, would help a non-Jewish reader to read the Hebrew script, he answered:

Dear Dr Pyper, have you ever read *anything*? I'm not just referring to a lack of general culture – one becomes wearily used to that – but to a broader question. What would it be – to *have read* something? Some kind of act of memory, of enlargement of the archive of your identity perhaps, but can one ever say that one *has read* something? There is always another reading – that is what iteration entails. Reach the final page, return to the beginning, and you read – a different book? The same book but with new eyes, a new I? I am what I have read, but I have never finally read anything. . . . What you have or haven't read are not the same, even if the books were the same.⁷⁸

Such an advancement in this culturally and temporally conditioned approach could hardly lead to a systematic treatment of a biblical (or any other) theology.

Conclusion

The diversity of recent approaches to the theology of the Tanakh has deepened considerably, so that it is by no means simple to classify, let alone “label,” authors based on their philosophical or methodological approaches to the

76. Leo Perdue names some new methods in Old Testament studies, e.g. new criticism, canonical methods, phenomenology and feminist hermeneutics. See Perdue, *Collapse of History*, 7.

77. Sekine, *Philosophical Interpretations of the Old Testament*.

78. Pyper, “Other Eyes,” 160.

subject matter. Nevertheless, conscious of the risks involved, even a simplified designation of such trends is important for a correct grasp of the topic.

In this vein, Báandy lists four possible hermeneutical approaches: (1) a “historical reconstruction of the gradual growth and development of Israel’s religious imaginations,” (2) “analysis of the material on the basis of traditional Christian dogmatics,” (3) “analysis of the material according to the individual canonical books,” and (4) “analysis of the material based on a theological crux or cruces of the canon.”⁷⁹ From these basic methodological approaches stem further new works. It only remains to be seen if it is still possible to discover a fundamentally new method which would also be appropriate to the subject matter of the biblical theology of the Tanakh.

79. Báandy, *Teológia Starej zmluvy*, 28.

5

Some More Recent Works of Conservative Theology of the Tanakh

Conservative theology of the Hebrew Bible continues to build on the historic Christian confessions and the Reformation view of the inspired authority of Scripture. In discussing those approaches which modify or reject traditional and Reformed faith, conservative authors bring forth old and new apologetic arguments in favour of regarding the Bible as the word of God. It would be a mistake to conclude, however, that this implies a lack of diversity in conservative theology. But a detailed analysis of differences between respective conservative theologies is not within the scope of this work.

Roland K. Harrison: *Introduction to the Old Testament* (1969)

Although Roland K. Harrison (1920–1993) did not write a work entitled “Old Testament theology,” his *Introduction* offered an informed and in-depth critique of the interpretations and theologies of the Tanakh based on the modernist philosophical worldview. This work provided a starting point for the works of other conservative theologians in the area of the theology of the Hebrew Bible.

Walter Kaiser: *Toward the Theology of the Old Testament* (1978)

The title of Kaiser’s (1933–) work¹ implies that his study does not have the breadth of a complete theology of the Hebrew Bible. Kaiser’s theology is consistently conservative, built upon the central notion of the *promise* of God, which is being fulfilled in history. Thus, this work is rooted in the tradition

1. Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology*.

of Hofmann's *Heilsgeschichte*. In the conclusion to his work, the author offers ideas for a theological link between Old and New Testaments.

John Sailhamer: *Introduction to Old Testament Theology* (1995)

The focal point of John Sailhamer's (1946–2017) interest is the Pentateuch as a narrative.² In order to facilitate a proper understanding of various methods in Old Testament theology, he wrote a very lucidly organized introduction, which uses an abundance of graphics and schematic illustrations. It also includes a proposal for a canonical theology of the Hebrew Bible, along with this definition of the task of theology:

The task of theology is the restatement of God's self-revelation. As we understand it, the Bible is the Word of God. In the Bible God has spoken. Thus the Bible is not merely a record of what God said in the past, but also a record of what God is saying today. By means of the words of Scripture, God has spoken and continues to speak to us today.³

His *Introduction to Old Testament Theology* carries the subtitle "a canonical approach." The author explains:

A canonical approach sees not only the content of the OT, but also its form, as theologically relevant. The final shape of the OT is as important as the actual course of events that are recounted in it. The message of the OT is as much a function of how it is written as of what it recounts. I do not understand the canonical approach to consist of driving a wedge between form and content, these two all-important features of the OT. It is not a matter of one or the other but of both.⁴

Sailhamer is also known for his attempt to reconstruct the understanding of Genesis 1 as a text that does not speak of the entire planet Earth but only the garden of Eden and, by analogy, the promised land for the nation of Israel.⁵ This interpretation has elicited all manner of reactions and is an example of the variability of approaches within conservative theology.

2. Sailhamer, *Pentateuch as Narrative*.

3. Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology*, 197.

4. Sailhamer, "Canonical Approach to the OT," 307.

5. Sailhamer, *Genesis Unbound*.

Charles H. Scobie: *The Ways of Our God* (2002)

Charles H. Scobie, in his massive volume on biblical theology (1038 pages), expresses his presuppositions thus: “The presuppositions of this study include belief that the Bible conveys a divine revelation, that the word of God in Scripture constitutes the norm of Christian faith and life, and that all the varied material of the OT and NT can in some way be related to the plan and purpose of the one God of the whole Bible.”⁶ According to Scobie, the central theme of biblical theology is the witness to God.⁷

The book contains an extended introduction to the history of biblical theology and is itself divided according to four themes: (1) the order of God, (2) the servant of God, (3) the people of God and (4) the way of God. The author also puts forward numerous theological reflections of a didactic and/or ethical nature.

Bruce Waltke: *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (2007)

In 2008, the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association announced Waltke’s Old Testament theology as “the book of the year” in the “Bible reference and study book” category. It is a noteworthy work spanning more than one thousand pages. Waltke’s theological starting point lies in respecting the Bible as the word of God:

The theologian should consider the Bible’s Source as inerrant and its teaching as infallible; should study the text for meaning rather than just as an account of the events recorded therein; should read the Old Testament as a unity, a product of the one Author; should read reverently, recognizing the authority of the text for the present day. . . . An Old Testament theology should seek the answer to the questions: What are major religious concerns and ideas (i.e., what is the message) of the Old Testament, and how did that message develop?⁸

His theology is divided into three main parts. In the first one (the introduction), the author deals with the foundation, task, and method of biblical theology; in the second (“primary history”), he goes through biblical history from the

6. Scobie, *Ways of Our God*, 47.

7. Scobie sees the unity of the Bible in its testimony about one God. See Scobie, *Ways of Our God*, 105.

8. Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 49.

creation of the universe to the return of Israel from exile; and the third part (“other writings”) is concerned with prophetic books and Wisdom literature.

David L. Baker: *Two Testaments, One Bible* (2010)

This work carries the subtitle *The Theological Relationship between the Old and New Testaments*, suggesting that, although this is not a systematic treatment of the theology of the Hebrew Bible, it addresses a question of crucial importance for biblical theology. The author gives a broad overview of scholars and their solutions to the problem of a relationship between the Tanakh and the New Testament. The book is useful not only as a historical introduction to the problem of biblical theology but also as a critical look at various hermeneutical paradigms in addressing the relationship between Old and New Testaments.

6

Conclusion

At the end of this account of the main motives at work in the history of the discipline of Old Testament theology, I shall recall the ones which Eduard König gives as the reasons behind its origin:¹ (1) anti-symbolic tendencies – liberation of exegesis from a confession and its subordination to a historical biblical system (covenant); (2) affection towards biblical text (against the proliferating orthodoxy, pietism began to focus on collecting biblical theological citations and opinions); (3) affinity for the modernizing world (according to some theologians, the biblical world was less contradictory to rational knowledge than the ecclesiastical system); and (4) attempt at unrestricted investigation into the historical process (for this reason, Gabler separated historical theology from normative church dogmatics).

It seems to me that the whole “business” of biblical theology is well captured by the words of the conservative theologian Walter Kaiser:

In spite of its highest hopes, biblical theology has not been able to restate and reapply the authority of the Bible. In fact, the Bible’s authority has, if anything, diminished during this period rather than increased. It has not fully avoided the sterility of source criticism on the one hand or the historicism of the history of religions on the other. Nor has the force of philosophical theology been exchanged in every case for a methodology that refused to lay any a priori grids of any sort over the grid.²

1. König, *Theologie des Alten Testaments: Kritisch und vergleichend dargestellt*, 1–3.

2. Kaiser, *Old Testament Theology*, 4.

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